

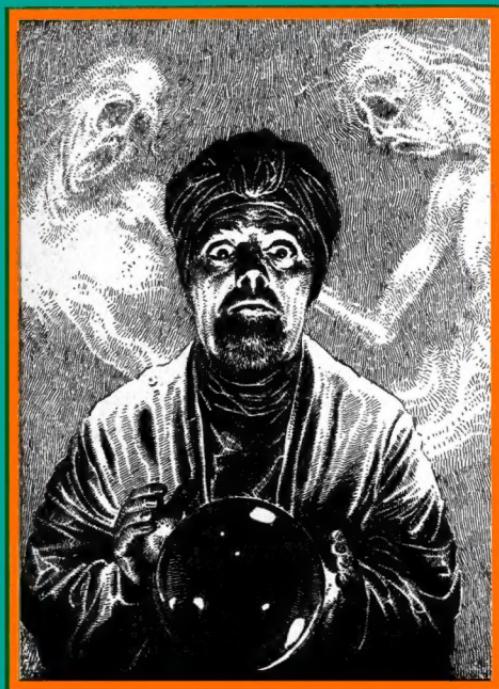
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MAGAZINE OF
HORROR

THE BIZARRE, THE FRIGHTENING, THE GRUESOME



**THE WHISTLING
CORPSE**

by G. G. PENDARVES

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**FEMININE
MAGIC**

A Tale From Cornwall
by DAVID H. KELLER, M.D.

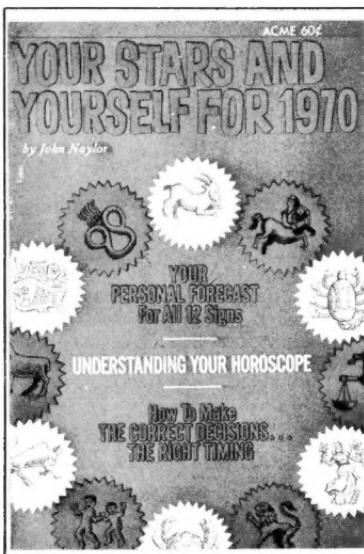
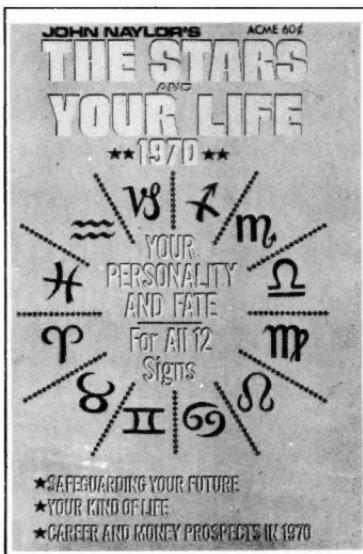
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**BRIDE OF
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**THE HEADLESS MILLER
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A Chilling Novelet by IRVIN ASHKENAZY

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MAGAZINE OF
HORROR

THE BIZARRE, THE FRIGHTENING, THE GRUESOME

Volume 6

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While the greatest diligence has been used to ascertain the owners of rights, and to secure necessary permissions, the editor and publisher wish to offer their apologies in any possible case of accidental infringements.

Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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The Editor's Page

Reminiscences on Seabury Quinn

In September 1931, I purchased my first issue of *WEIRD TALES*, which opened with the "letters from readers" department (*The Eyrie*) running through ads, as does this department you are reading; and on the first page I read a letter from one Miss Gertrude Hemkin of Chicago, which said, among others things: "... I am glad to note that you are giving us Jules de Grandin again. He is the most amusing person I've met in stories so far, and I congratulate the author on his successful brain-child. I do not speak or understand enough French to hold any conversation, but the exclamations and phrases that the little Frenchman uses are plain enough for me to understand."

This was interesting enough — but who was Jules de Grandin? Who was the author? There was no editorial comment explaining, and no other mention from other readers in this issue. But in the back of the magazine was a little squib in

a box, saying: "Coming Soon! *The Devil's Bride*, by Seabury Quinn. A thrilling weird novel about Jules de Grandin." That told me something, at least; and four months later, the serial started, in the February 1932 issue. The first installment had me hooked, and I looked forward eagerly for the next de Grandin tale for many years following, up to the time when Farnsworth Wright left the editorial chair of *WEIRD TALES*, and the de Grandin series seemed to have stopped. After that, I purchased the magazine sporadically — sometimes a single issue, sometimes several in a row — but the appearance of this favored character always assured my buying a new issue as soon as I had looked through it.

Then, when *WEIRD TALES* finally folded in 1954, it seemed as if I would never hear of Seabury Quinn again. By this time I had gathered and collected most of the old issues of WT prior to

1932, and had read all the de Grandin tales published before my introduction to them. Of course, there were many fine stories by Mr. Quinn, independent of the series. But a fictional character one takes to can grow on you to the extent that you'd rather see a new tale in the series than a much better one by the same author that has nothing to do with it. This is something that has been happening from the time that the first well-known writer became fascinated with a particular character and started writing an open-ended series of tales around him or her; and the more successful the series, the greater the burden has eventually become upon the author. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle became weary of Sherlock Holmes and was distressed by the fact that more attention was given to Holmes and Watson than to other fiction he wrote, which he considered far better. We know what happened: he tried to close the series by decently having his hero fall in the line of duty — an entry in his diary reads: "*Killed Holmes!*" — and hundreds of thousands of readers over the world cried out that it was indecent and monstrous. G. K. Chesterton felt that his Father Brown stories were decidedly below his best fiction, but remembering what happened to Conan Doyle — who was forced to resurrect the Master Detective — carefully refrained from homicide. So de Grandin and Trowbridge neither die peacefully nor meet violent deaths; the reports of their activities merely become less frequent.

Seabury Quinn is no longer with us in the flesh; he passed into the next stage of life a little more than a week before his 81st birthday, which fell on January 1, 1970. I first heard about this from Frank Dietz, co-publisher of *LUNA MONTHLY*, who asked me if I would be willing to do a short feature write-up on

STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

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* * *

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*a complete Simon
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* * *

LAURA

a new story
by Joseph H. Bloom

* * *

THE BRIDE OF DEWER

a Jules de Grandin novelet

by Seabury Quinn

* * *

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See Page 123

**WEIRD
T E R R O R
TALES**

*presents in its Fall
1970 issue (No. 3)*

STRAGELLA

an eerie Novelet

by
Hugh B. Cave

* * *

**THE CHURCH STOVE
AT RAEBRUDAFISK**

by G. Appleby Terrill

* * *

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* * *

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a bizarre novelet

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*plus other stories, and
popular Readers' departments*

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see page 125*

Mr. Quinn for his February issue. I had not seen any newspaper write-ups, and there was not time to obtain them since Frank needed the copy within a day or two. I had to work with such biographical material that was available in the Arkham House collection of de Grandin stories (*The Phantom Fighter*, 1966; Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin, 53583; \$5.00); memory of which I was certain; and my correspondence with him between 1964 and 1970. Later, Frank sent me photostats of the obituary notices that appeared in *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, *THE WASHINGTON POST*, and *THE EVENING STAR*. The two latter write-ups contain errors of fact that I know of; but, so far as I know, the short *TIMES* squib does not err.

Seabury Grandin Quinn was born in Washington, D.C., January 1st, 1889, and was named after an ancestor, Samuel Seabury, who was the first bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. He received his bachelor and master of laws degrees from the old National University Law School, but was, as he relates: "... too young to take the bar and one night, at loose ends, asked my uncle if he had any good books I could read. He gave me *Dracula*. Well, I read that story from 9 that night until 4 the next morning, when I went upstairs to bed with my back strictly to the wall."

I wish I had known of this detail earlier, as I would have been delighted to tell him that my own first experience with *Dracula* was no less frightening. I first heard it as told by a fellow Scout, one night in camp after lights out, in 1929. The next year, I found the book in the Darien public library — and couldn't finish it! It was the last weird story I read that really terrified me, and it wasn't until the late '40s that I got around to reading it from cover to cover,

although I'd seen the film with Bela Lugosi several times and the story no longer had traumatic effects.

A few years after this vivid introduction to weird fiction, Seabury Quinn tried his hand at writing a horror story, *Demons of the Night*. He sold it — but not easily; there were 30 rejections, before it was finally published by a pulp magazine, the title of which is unknown to me. The new-hatched author did not put all else aside for the vocation of writing, however; he practiced law from 1911 to 1918 in a Washington partnership, and either left this position, or took leave from it, to serve in the Army during the Great War. After his military service, he became editor of a chain of trade magazines in New York, and also taught and lectured on the subject of medical jurisprudence, as well as writing technical articles. Weird fiction of his appeared in such publications as *THE THRILL BOOK* and *YOUNG'S MAGAZINE*. *The Stone Image*, which appeared in the first of these two titles, has a character named Dr. Trowbridge; this, however, is not the first story in the later series. Quinn wrote me in 1965: "Doctor Trowbridge has a 'walk-on' part in *The Stone Image*, but Jules de Grandin did not make his appearance until *The Horror on the Links*. Indeed, I hadn't even thought of him at the time *The Stone Image* was written for Street & Smith's old *THRILL BOOK*."

All in all, Seabury Quinn had over 500 short stories published, but for most of us it is the 154 stories which appeared in *WEIRD TALES* that are of the greatest interest. He also wrote 13 articles in WT — a weird crimes series and a series dealing with the Salem Witchcraft, plus an obituary tribute to Farnsworth Wright in the November 1940 issue; thus his total number of contributions to *WEIRD TALES* was 168, not including reprints of stories first published there.

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(The only other author to have over 100 stories in WT is August Derleth.) Another unique feature is the number of series stories by Seabury Quinn that appeared in WT; no one else came close to his total of 93 tales; and a third is the fact that, during the period 1926-1939 his tales copped more covers on this single magazine than did the stories of any science fiction writer on all the science fiction magazines appearing during those years.

The Phantom Farmhouse (October 1923, his debut in W.T.) was very well received and remained one of the most popular stories published by *WEIRD TALES*; it was reprinted in the March 1929 issue. I have read that Quinn was not paid for the original appearance, due to the precarious position of WT (which nearly folded up for keeps in 1924), and of course Wright was unable to pay for anything in his reprint department. A similar rumor relates to the short story, *The Cloth of Madness*, which did not appear originally in *WEIRD TALES*, but ran there as a reprint in the May 1929 issue; it had first appeared in 1919, in *YOUNG'S MAGAZINE*, which folded up before it was paid for. This information was published in a fan magazine in the '30s, noting that Mr. Quinn never received a penny for his two most popular stories. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of either of these two case histories, so far as payment for the original publicationis concerned; but it is possible that the first money he ever received for *The Cloth of Madness* came from *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, when we reprinted it in our 10th issue, August 1965. (*The Phantom Farmhouse* was revived by August Derleth for his anthology, *Who Knocks*, in 1946, so he received something for it before our reprint in MOH No. 7, January, 1965.)

He related how the Jules de Grandin series started in the short essay, *By Way*

of Explanation, which appears on pages vii and viii of *The Phantom Fighter*: "One evening in the spring of 1925 I was in that state that every writer knows and dreads; a story was due my publisher, and there didn't seem to be a plot in the world. Accordingly, with nothing particular in mind, I picked up my pen and — literally making it up as I went along — wrote the first story which appears in this book.

"As with *Terror on the Links*, so with all other adventures of de Grandin. I have never had a definite plot in mind when commencing one of his memoirs, and it is seldom that I have so much as a single well defined incident of the proposed story thought out in advance. From first to last Jules de Grandin has seemed to say, '*Friend Quinn, je suis present. En avant, write me!*' Perhaps there's something to the Socratic theory of the daemon within, after all."

The original title of the story was, *The Horror on the Links*, and it is under this title that it appeared in the October 1925 issue of *WEIRD TALES* — exactly two years after Quinn's debut there. It was not the lead-off story, nor did it have the cover illustration (although "Seabury Quinn" appears among the list of authors' names thereon); this is doubly regrettable, since that issue bore Farnsworth Wright's first — and, alas, not last — attempt to present a humorous cover. The illustration was taken from the story, *The Wicked Flea*, by J. U. Giesy, and shows a dog-size flea chasing a dog. From what I dimly recall hearing at one time, the issue did not pick up in sales.

Two issues later, we saw *The Tenants of Broussac*, with a very fine cover illustration. Mr. Quinn wrote me on February 15, 1967: "I recall perfectly writing the story, and remember how Joe Doolin and I worked put (ting) together what we thought would be a

satisfactory painting for the cover of WT presenting the story.

"The Tenants was written at a time when I had no idea of making J de G the lead character in a series, but Wright practically demanded I embark on such a series. The result has been very satisfactory to both me and Jules de Grandin."

(A reproduction of Doolin's cover appears in the first part of the Jules de Grandin chronology, which we ran in the Summer 1969 *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* — No. 13.)

The third story in the series was *The Isle of Missing Ships*, which ran in the February 1926 *WEIRD TALES*. About this, Mr. Quinn wrote me in September 1968: "As I recall it, that was the third de Grandin story, and I distinctly remember how much I enjoyed it, but how I feared Wright might return it because it contained no supernatural elements. However, he did not, and readers of forty-plus years ago seemed to enjoy it although one or two lady readers did reproach me for having de G cut Goonong Besar's throat, saying it was a cold-blooded murder. Otherwise the story went over very well, as I hope it did in its recent reincarnation."

(No reader of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*, lady or otherwise, objected to de Grandin's cold-bloodedly cutting the throat of the cold-blooded murderer in the story.) And, relieved from anxiety about the editor's rejecting a de Grandin tale without supernatural elements, the author thereafter mixed them up, so that you could not be sure, when you started reading any one of them, whether this one would or would not turn out to have supernatural elements. All, however, contained bizarre elements, and *WEIRD TALES'* sub-title was "a magazine of the bizarre and the unusual."

When I received my copy of *The*
(continued on page 120)

The Headless Miller Of Kobold's Keep

by Irvin Ashkenazy

As with many others, IRVIN ASHKENAZY submitted his first story to be accepted under a pseudonym, and then wondered, later on, why he hadn't used his real name. The story was heartily acclaimed by the readers of WEIRD TALES in 1937. There are sometimes good reasons for using a pen name, even from the start — although generally, the sound reasons for aliases come after an author has started to sell material regularly — but usually one regrets it later on, as your editor did.

*Mr. Abiathar Hall,
Purchasing Director,
American Antiques, Inc.,
New York, N.Y.*

Dear Mr. Hall:

I herewith tender my resignation, effective immediately.

Maybe what I have seen tonight is all in my mind. Maybe it never really happened and the events that I believe to have occurred are but morbid hallucinations. If so, then I am the victim of the maddest cacodemonia a man's mind has ever been

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blasted with and all the more reason why I should resign this job and stop poking my nose into strange and unholy places. I'm through!

In all fairness to you, I suppose, I should give an account of what has occurred to bring me to this decision. I find it difficult to do so. I am no occultist. I have always scoffed at tales of spirits, ghosts, devils, or other spiritual manifestations. But tonight my faith in the fundamental reasonableness of God and Nature is shaken. Perhaps, as I've suggested already, I'm mad. After reading my account I suppose *you* will be sure of it!

How you ever suspected the existence of Kobold's Keep, even as only a legend, is a matter of wonder to me. It is marked on no map that I have ever seen. And I was practically on top of the place before I found anybody who'd ever heard of it.

I had dismissed the existence of Kobold's Keep as being, in fact, a legend, until one morning, while driving north along a narrow dirt road that wound among the mountains, I came to the village of Merlin.

While the attendant ministered to my gas tank at the hamlet's solitary filling station I sat back and took stock of my surroundings. The mountain peaks that serrated the skyline ahead seemed to be even loftier, craggier, more forbidding than the ones I had come over already. I wondered whether my brakes and bearings would hold out until I got to the next town. The sour-faced, close-mouthed hill-billy who was pumping gasoline into my tank didn't impress me much as a possible repair man. And neither did the old fellow, whom I took to be his assistant, who was sitting at the base of the gas pump, knees drawn up under his chin, eyes shut tight, apparently fast asleep.

The old man caught my interest. He was, to say the least, an unusual type. His long, lank, dirty gray hair fell to his shoulders in two braids, like an Indian's. His face, weather-beaten and hairless, was broad and lean, the cheekbones as prominent as a cat's, his nose thin and hooked. I was about to question the station attendant whether the old fellow wasn't a member of some Indian reservation hereabouts that I hadn't heard of, when I noticed his hair more closely. At first glance it had seemed to

be a dirty gray, but I saw now that it was actually red — a faded, nondescript, pinkish red, but red, nevertheless. I'd never heard of a red-headed Indian.

The ancient, red-headed anomaly yawned. I observed a curious, crescent-shaped swelling in the center of his forehead. Its bottom border was fringed with little hairs, like misplaced eyelashes.

As if sensing my fixed stare, the old man's head lifted. I looked for his eyes to open. They seemed oddly sunken.

It was an unusually hot day. Yet, as I looked, I grew cold—cold and rigid, and a little sick; for the old man had opened his one, solitary, sky-blue eye. It was in the center of his forehead.

My horror must have been written on my face, for the old man's mouth slit in a frightful, toothless grin. I turned away hastily. . . .

Of course, I'd heard of similar cases of persons born with cyclopean eye formations as recorded in medical history. But being faced with such an individual unexpectedly, even in broad daylight, is enough to give anyone a start.

I jerked my eyes away and tried to get a grip on myself — all the while being aware of that great, bulging, sky-blue orb fixed on me in dreadful contemplation.

"Have you ever," I asked the surly-faced attendant (as I had asked at every town, village, and hamlet in the state through which I'd passed), "have you ever heard of a place hereabouts called Kobold's Keep?"

The attendant, who was screwing my radiator cap back on, looked up suddenly. He stared at me a moment; then, averting his gaze, finished what he was doing. "Naw," he growled, and knocked a tomato can into the ditch with a rifled stream of tobacco juice. "Never heered of it."

A nasal, cackling laugh clattered on the still air. "Don't ye believe him, mister! He's lyin', Jim is! He's heered of the place all right!"

Torn between repulsion and a horrible fascination, I slowly turned and gazed on the dreadful face of the ancient mountain

cyclops who sat by the gasoline pump. His bulging eye rolled, glistening in the bright sunlight. His toothless mouth writhed with crazy mirth.

"Don't pay him no mind," the attendant muttered sullenly. "He's crazy."

The old man slapped his thigh with a renewed spasm of hissing laughter. "If that don't beat all! 'Don't pay him no mind,' he says! I'm outeren my head, I am! What you want to lie to the feller for Jim? Tell him!" He paused, subsiding reflectively, "But you can't go thataway, mister. You gotta leave your autymobile behind. It'll take more'n gasoline to git *that* thing over Black Knicht Pass!"

Black Knicht . . . Black Knicht . . . I stared at the old fellow curiously. Shockingly repulsive as he still was, most of the horror I'd experienced upon first laying eyes on him was fast evaporating. He was simply a freak . . . But what had he just said?

"Black Knicht Pass," he repeated, pronouncing the "Knicht" with the old Teutonic "ch" guttural—a sound that was dropped from modern English many centuries ago. "It's the on'y way ye kin git over the ridge into the Devil's Millhop."

"Black *Knight*, you mean, don't you?" I said curiously.

The bulging blue eye blinked. "Knicht," the old man repeated, "Black Knicht . . . It'll take ye over into the Millhop, and there—there ye'll find the thriving' town of Kobold's Keep!" His eldritch laughter whistled and sucked between his toothless gums.

"Iffen you listen to that loon," the attendant spat, "you're fixin' to git yourself in a peck o' trouble. You want to stay outeren Kobold's Keep, brother!"

Then there *was* such a place!

"Yeah," he growled sourly. "It's there, all right. And so is hell!"

At the moment I was puzzled and irritated because of the fellow's manifest reluctance to have me go to Kobold's Keep. After all, what business was it of his? I tried to discover some reason for his attitude.

"Don't be askin' no questions and you won't be gittin' no lies," he responded discourteously. "You can't git to Kobold's Keep onless you walk or git a mule. And when you git there the main thing you'll be wantin' to do is to git out. So just drive on your way, brother, and forget that you ever heered about the damned place!"

"But I've got to get there," I insisted. "I have business there."

One bushy black eyebrow lifted, "Business?" the mountaineer drawled incredulously. "Business in Kobold's Keep?"

"And why shouldn't he be havin' business there?" the old man cackled. "Kobold's Keep is a right smart town. Better'n this hole! Ye needn't be a-knockin', Jim, ye scut! Kobold's Keep is one o' the finest towns in these whole mountings!"

I began to lose patience. "I have business there! Damned important business! And if I can't get there by car, then I'd just as soon leave it here and rent a horse or a mule for the trip."

"Must be gosh-awful important," the attendant muttered.

"See here," I cried, "what the devil's the matter with the place? Why are you so damned anxious to have me stay away?"

He glanced at me out of the corner of his eye, and spat. "Believe it or not, mister, I'm tryin' to keep you out for your own good."

"Oh, nonsense! What is there to be afraid of?"

"Wal," he drawled, "for one thing—the people."

"The people? What's the matter with the people?"

"Yah!" the old cyclops screeched. "Ain't nothin' the matter with 'em! Don't you listen to that damn' fool, mister! The citizens o' Kobold's Keep are right fine, upstandin' citizens!" And the glistening blue eye in his forehead blinked emphatically.

The attendant swept the freak with a lowering glance. He turned to me and jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "He comes from Kobold's Keep. He's one of 'em. And he don't look so bad as the most of 'em. But that ain't the wust part."

He pulled a dirty rag out of his pocket and began to wipe the inside of my windshield.

"No?" I prompted.

"Naw," he drawled out of the corner of his mouth. "It ain't. The place is hexed. There's been a curse on it since the days when Injuns owned these mountings—afore the days o' my great-gran'pappy's great-gran'pappy, hunnerts and hunnerts o' year ago. That curse has been on it. And still is. I ain't askin' you to believe nothin', mister. I'm just tellin' you that no stranger who ever got into Kobold's Keep ever lived more'n a day after leavin' it!"

"Whut's that he's sayin'?" the old man drooled. "Is that lowdown dawg tellin' more lies about the Keep? Don't ye believe a word he says, mister! He's plumb loony, he is! Why, I'll guide ye to the Millhop myself, I will! And cheap, too!"

"You're hired!" I agreed promptly, and turned to the attendant. "Could I rent parking-space over in that shed for a couple of days?"

He shrugged. "You can. And, I reckon, you'll be wantin' a mule, too." He seemed to give up all efforts to dissuade me from visiting Kobold's Keep.

"Two mules," I corrected. "One for my guide."

He laughed shortly and with a grim significance that, at the moment, entirely escaped me. "That'll be all right," the cyclops croaked hastily. "I won't be needin' no critter. I'd ruther lead ye afoot."

"And see that he allus keeps a good ten paces away fom the mule," the attendant growled, "or the critter 'll shy and throw ye as sure as God made little ducks!"

He sauntered around to the back of his shack behind the station and presently returned leading as ancient and wobegone-looking a beast as I've ever seen, alive or dead. He led the blind, spavined creature to within thirty feet of the old freak when the hobbling bag of bones suddenly snorted, as if he'd scented a mountain lion, reared up in terror, planted his front legs down with a crash, and refused to budge.

"Do ye git whut I mean?" the attendant leered.

Frankly, I didn't. But I could hardly afford to waste any

more time trying to get around the patent stupidities of my filling-station mountaineer. I got down to business. How much did he want for the use of the mule for a couple of days? I was willing to pay a reasonable rental.

"*Rent* this mule?" he grinned sardonically. "I ain't rentin', mister. I'm sellin'. I ain't so sure you're comin' back."

I flared with anger. Hadn't he my car as security?

He shrugged. "I'm sellin'. One hunnert dollars. Take it or leave it."

It was an outrageous price to pay for the moribund animal, but it was too early to be looking around and I was too much in a hurry, anyway. I took it.

He drove my car into the shed, then got out and threw a mildewed old saddle on the mule. "Must be moughty important business you've got in Kobold's Keep," he muttered as he tightened the cinch strap.

"You've been there, I suppose?" I ventured casually.

He looked up—shook his head slowly. "Naw, mister. Once, when I was a young sprout, I clumb to the top of the Pass and looked down into the Millhop. I could see the shacks of the place way off below. Yeah. I could even see some of the critters who live there. But I never went down to take a closer look. I got better sense."

"That doesn't sound reasonable!" I protested. "What's there to be scared of? What kind of people live there?"

He glanced at the cyclops. The great eye in the center of the freak's forehead winked weirdly, the toothless black gums showing in a lipless grin.

"Same kind as he is, I reckon. On'y this'n seems like the best-lookin' critter that ever came outen the Devil's Millhop. That's why he's still here now, I reckon. The others what tried it got kilt or chased back. There was no puttin' up with the sight of them!"

Black Knicht Pass . . . the Devil's Millhop . . . Kobold's Keep . . . it all sounded like a Barnum's paradise. I guess I must have grinned, for the mountaineer scowled and I could get no further word out of him.

The cyclops hopped to his feet with surprizing agility as I mounted my decrepit steed, and plunged down a steep embankment into a ravine that ran at right angles to the road. I hesitated, met the jaundiced sneer of the station attendant, then kicked the ribs of my blind mule so that he half slid, half dived down the road bank. The cyclops, turning, winked, then plunged into the woods, leading a good thirty feet or more.

Through silent, needle-cushioned pine forest, across dark and rocky mountain flanks, over verdant, flower-studded meadows the strange old fellow guided me. For all his apparent senility he was possessed of an astonishing vigor. His thin old legs skipped along with the spring and easy grace of youth. And when the country began to grow rougher, the grassy carpet sparser, and the rocks blacker and more cruelly sharp, he negotiated the difficult terrain with the supple, careless ease of a mountain goat, while my feeble old mule gasped and heaved and forced me to dismount and struggle along beside her over the crenellated rocks.

Our progress, however, was steady, and I found times during the smoother stretches in which to ponder certain strange peculiarities that I had noticed in the natives of this part of the state—and, more particularly, the peculiarities that I had observed in the eldritch fantasm who was my guide.

That he was a hybrid of some sort I had no doubt. Probably he was a Melungeon—one of those dark people who are descendants of early English settlers who took Indian wives. Still, I had never before met one who displayed such a combination of physical degeneracy with wiry stamina. As I contemplated his skipping figure, his pale pink braids waving in the air, his ragged overalls constantly on the verge of slipping off, I couldn't help but fancy that he wasn't exactly human—that he was, really, a cloven-footed goblin, and emanation of evil possessed of the immortality and deathless strength of Satan.

I smiled to myself. That was giving my fancy entirely too much leeway. For the world to me was a reasonable place—and belief in devils, evil spirits and such I took as a matter of course to be the products of sick minds and the spawn of ignorance.

The cyclops had called the mountain we would have to cross the "Black Knicht"—pronouncing it with the long unused Anglo-Saxon "ch" sound. Black Knicht! Why, the word "knight" hadn't been pronounced that way since the Fourteenth Century—a hundred years before America was officially discovered!

I knew that the mountaineers inhabiting these peaks are, perhaps, the purest bred stock in all America—fair, blue-eyed folk, descended from the earliest English settlers, being born, marrying among themselves, and dying within the radius of a few miles, generation after generation. I have met many who have never yet seen a railroad train, although I suspect aircraft passing overhead have become a familiar sight by now. I have found many a treasure of furniture and brassware among their mean huts—articles inherited from father to son down through the centuries.

Yet—Black Knicht! It worried me. Fourteenth Century stuff in Twentieth Century America! I concluded that the way he pronounced it must have been only a personal peculiarity.

Our ascent had become many degrees steeper. Then, quite abruptly, as we came to a looming wall of rock barring our way, the cyclops vanished. I soon discovered that he had disappeared into a narrow cleft in the raw stone—a cleft that rapidly widened into wide, though unevenly graded, road. Overhead the sky gleamed like a crooked blue ribbon and thinned the shadows within the pass so that the figure of my guiding imp was a visible, though dim, silhouette. A cold, dank wind whispered about my ears and explored my summer clothes with chill fingers. I crouched close to my mule's neck for warmth.

Suddenly the path at the bottom of the crevasse grew straighter, smoother. Far ahead I could see the walls of the cleft fall away into sky, crystal-clear, a bright background framing the black silhouette of the cyclops, standing motionless, watching me like a monstrous, one-eyed ghoul . . .

Thoughtlessly, I let my mule have its head, and it wasn't until she suddenly snorted, reared, and flung me to the hard rock that I realized I'd let her approach the cyclops too closely. I still

was seeing stars while the clattering gallop of my panic-stricken animal drummed in my ears, sounding more faintly with every hoofbeat.

I picked myself up and plodded painfully up to where the cyclops stood, his bulging eyes sparkling giddily, his toothless jaws writhing in silent laughter.

We had reached the top of Black Knicht Pass. I peered down and saw spread before me the panorama of the Devil's Millhop.

It resembles nothing so much as a huge black bowl with vertical sides, and almost perfectly circular. Perhaps it's as much as four miles in diameter. I could see absolutely not a single break in the great barrier of black cliffs that surround it. Then the ugly devil who was with me pointed to a precipitous path dropping away from the lip of the pass down the face of the cliff by a series of narrow, natural steps. I believe now that it's the only route by which a human being may enter or leave that frightful chasm.

The terrain of the Devil's Millhop, while showing patches of green here and there, seemed to be the same color as the rocks—basalt black. And though I scanned every section of the place, the only habitations I could discern were some curious hatches of black stones, almost invisible against the soot-like ground, grouped near the center of the bowl. A narrow waterfall splashed from the distant cliffs like a sliver of pale silver, and fed a brook coursing through the center of the Millhop. The brook, after speeding down a sink about a quarter of a mile in diameter that indented the bottom of the bowl, seemed to disappear into the ground.

"See yander?" the cyclops pointed, grinning. "In the sink, where the brook disappears . . . see, that fine black mansion?"

I strained my eyes. Sure enough. It was quite pretentious, built in the style of —a castle? Anyway, I thought I could discern turrets. There seemed to be some kind of bulky affair hanging over the spot where the brook vanished—something that seemed suspended on an axis jutting from the building.

"Oh, that!" the cyclops crackled. "That's the mill! Gran'pappy Kobolder had him a fancy house across the water that he called the Keep. So when he come here, he and his three sons they built this mill to grind the corn they larned to grow. And the ole man—he called it the Keep!" The eye winked.

"When did this happen?" Those curious stone dwellings offered food for speculation.

"Oh, long, long, long time ago, I reckon." The cyclops sat on his haunches and grinned spasmodically. "The ole folks down yander"—he jerked a thumb over his shoulder—"they sometimes mumble lies of whut *their* great, great-gran'pappy done tol' 'em. Maybe some of it ain't lies, though."

The eye winked confidentially.

"Maybe it ain't a lie that Gran'pappy Kobolder was a boss man—a Knicht, they called'em in those days . . . Yeah—a Knicht. Funny, ain't it? He was a sinful man, murderin' and thievin'—yeah . . . They chased him plumb outen the land over there 'cross the water . . . and he come here with a slew of people who, I reckon, had been share-croppin' on his land. I reckon it was somethin' like that . . . They come here and settle down . . . But all that's a moughy long time ago, I reckon. Nobody knows how long. There's an old book made o' sheephide, seems-like, down yander in the Keep. Gran'pap wrote it hisself. He was full o' book-larnin', they say. A boss Knicht had to be, I reckon. But I don't figure it's in English . . . Queer-lookin' printin'. Some furrin' language they spoke in them days, I guess . . ."

The bulging blue eye regarded me contemplatively. I must have showed my excitement. "Whut's on your mind?" he snarled, his black gums showing.

"Who owns that property?" I asked, trying to repress my eagerness. "Who is living there now?"

The old degenerate burst into a hilarious cackle. "Who owns it?" he says! "Who's livin' there now?" Hee, hee!"

I snapped, "What's so funny?"

"I'll tell you who owns it, mister! The feller that built it owns it! And the feller who built it is the feller who's still livin'

in it right this very minute! It's old Robin Kobolder—the great-great-great-gran'pappy of us all down yander!"

I didn't press the point. The fellow, of course, was quite mad.

The glistening eye studied me avidly.

"How come you're so all-fired hot on comin' here?" he inquired. "What you so het up about Gran'pappy Kobold and his ole mill?"

I explained as patiently as I could that I might buy it if the price was right. Now that I was completely recovered and rested I was on pins and needles to be moving down before night overtook us.

The huge blue eye rolled with high humor. "Let's get going," I broke into his cackling.

He scampered down the side of the precipice as nimbly as any lemur. Evidently he knew every step, ridge and cranny by heart. I followed slowly, laboriously, clinging to the wall with trepidation, averting my eyes from the sheer drop below me, yet considering at the same time that it would require careful preparation and much delicate work with block and tackle to remove any possible purchase I might make in this strange crater.

When I got to the bottom I paused, sniffing disgustedly, for the smell of the ground was utterly fetid. I scuffed the soil with my boot, picked up a handful. It was loose, granular and flinty, reeking with an unpleasant chemical cacosmia. No wonder vast stretches of this bottom land were dark and barren. No possible thing might grow in it. Perhaps in some ancient day this had been the mouth of a monster volcano that had spewed up poisonous substances which, even today, carried the breath of death . . .

A silence covered the valley like a choking blanket of dark swan's-down. An invisible cap seemed to seal the hole in the ground hermetically against the murmurs of life outside—the whisper of summer breezes, the song of birds, the rustle of trees. But as we strode toward the cluster of stone hutches on the farther side of the bowl I began to distinguish the sound of the waterfall—echoing and re-echoing like water splashing inside a bass drum. It accentuated the silence by its very solitude.

When I had viewed them from a distance I could have sworn I'd seen men moving about among the black stone hutches, but, as we approached, they appeared to be strangely deserted. The houses, thrown crudely together, were shockingly primitive and foul. They squatted in aimless clusters like a colony of filthy black bugs. The rock, I surmised, was their sole source of building material. As far as I could see, not a tree existed anywhere in this monstrous bowl. In fact, the only green things I saw growing were the infrequent garden patches that grew in hummocks of what was quite evidently, imported soil.

The cyclops halted before one of the larger hutches. "Funnel!" he screeched. "Open up, ye blabbermouth scound'el! It's me, Glim!"

There was no reply. Perhaps it was my nerves—but I could not escape the feeling that I was being watched; that eyes—many pairs of eyes—were peering at me covertly; eyes glinting from between stone chinks—peering from around corners . . . I could catch fleeting glimpses of bodies from out of the corner of my eye now and then, but whenever I turned quickly there was—nothing.

Enraged, the cyclops was kicking the tall slate slab that served as a door. And presently, slowly, inch by inch, the slab began to move outward. The cyclops stepped back, his huge blue eye blazing with wrath. A creature stuck its head out and peered at us.

I cannot adequately describe it. I can only say that Horror stared from that misshapen, rat-eared head. It was the head and face of a being scarcely three feet tall, capped with a matted bush of filthy black furze that straggled into the squinting, Mongoloid eyes. The creature had no nose. From where the nose was supposed to be the face shot out horizontally in a ghastly anostosis of the bone, both jaws opening forward and outward, the green-yellow fangs protruding beyond the lips like the mouth of a misshapen banshee.

"Git outen the door!" the cyclops screeched, and advancing a pace, grabbed the creature by the hair and jerked it out.

The tiny gargoyle had virtually no body at all. Its huge,

chinless head sloped down to a scrawny infant's torso, a pair of crooked match-stick legs, and two tiny clubbed feet. Its bent toes and tiny fingers were webbed.

"That's Funnel," the cyclops said, nodding to the creature.

Glancing at the monstrous mouth, I understood the name. He stood there in the muted light, eyeing me, motionless. I stared a moment as the cyclops entered the four-smelling hutch. Each slanting eye of the creature contained two beady pupils.

Within the rocky hutch a perpetual twilight reigned. The light filtered through the cracks and crannies between the slabs of the rock. In the center of the room was a table made of a single slab of slate supported by a block of hewn granite. Smaller blocks served as chairs. On the table were a broken clay crock and several clay mugs.

I followed the cyclops' example and sat down at the table. He poured a dark, heavy-odored liquor into two of the mugs and handed me one. I watched him drain his, then sniffed at mine. A rather sweetish, though flat, scent.

The bulging blue eye winked confidentially.

"Not bad, eh?" He smacked his lips and filled his mug again. "We make it outen honey. It goes down even better'n White Mule."

I tasted it—and was rather shaken by its strength. A hazy memory floated around the inner depths of my mind . . . the memory of tales of ancient Cornish feasting-halls, where warriors rolled under the benches, drunk with a fermented liquor made of honey, water, and spices. . . . They called it mead . . .

Idiocy writhed in the freak's gibbering mouth.

"Ole Gran'pappy Kobolder—we call him Kobold for short—wal, he was the one who fust mixed the fust mashpot full of this stuff. He mixed it up in Cornwall, and up in the fur North Country—and then he brought the idear with him here. He was a smart bugger, he was!"

My skin prickled. "How do you know all this?" I asked. But he didn't hear, apparently. And, presently, I remarked on the shyness of the populace around here.

The cyclops agreed. "They ain't used to visitors," he explained. "Shucks, the last time anybody come hereabouts was—wal, come to think of it, it was exactly a year ago to this very day. It were an old priest, I remember. Yeah. He crawled down Black Knicht and began prayin' for his salvation when he seen some of the ugly scound'els around here! I reckon he figured he'd come to an outcrop of Satan's kingdom!"

And the cyclops laughed with huge, nasal mirth, his rolling eye crinkling at the corners.

"I showed him around. Yeah. I took the holy scound'el down to the Keep itself! I showed him the furniture, the things that's been lyin' around untouched for hunnerts and hunnerts of years. Yeah . . . But when I showed him Gran'pappy's ole book, blamed if the rascal didn't claim that it was a fake!"

"A fake!"

"Yeah. The blamed ole fool claimed that Gran'pappy never wrote it. Said it was a Bible printed by some feller named Caxton!"

You can understand how I thrilled to my very soul. A Bible by Caxton! William Caxton, date—1477! I realized that I was on the verge of a priceless discovery.

There was a stealthy scuffling of footfalls just outside the walls of the hutch—I'd been aware of them for several minutes now. I could almost feel the eyes peering at me through the chinks and envision the shapeless monstrosities crowding about the hutch to spy on me—to listen. My horror and disgust were giving way now to a misty sort of pity. Poor, hopeless, Godforsaken wretches! They were so desperately frightened of, yet hungry for, contact with the outside world. But, I sighed to myself, better that they stay here, unknown and unmolested. The milk of human kindness ran thin throughout the world . . . Once I thought I heard a sound in the rear of the room—the dark threshold of what was probably a sleeping-chamber.

"Gran'pappy didn't cotton to that priest none," the cyclops was mouthing again. "When mornin' come, damn iffen we didn't find that priest lyin' in the door of the main room in the mill. His head was chopped clean off."

"Gran'pappy?" I repeated stupidly.

"Shore. Gran'pappy Kobold. He didn't like that old priest. He chopped his haid off!" He grinned more hideously than ever, and edged a little closer toward me. "Though, jes' between you and me, stranger, maybe the old priest stumbled against the door-jamb under which Gran'pappy's ax-head is hangin', and the shakin' made it fall so that it hit the priest in the neck and killed him . . . Still"—he shrugged—"ye can't tell about sperrits. They say that them what see's Gran'pappy's sperrit walkin' dies on the spot. Or, anyways, within twenty-four hours. It ain't never failed yit, mister!"

I pressed him for details about Grandfather Kobolder.

He grinned nauseatingly, winked, and leaned forward. "He was the Knicht. The big boss man. But he was gittin' old—old and the cold was creepin' into his bones. He began cotchin' young uns when their mamies weren't lookin'—and then cuttin' off their hails and drinkin' their blood. It kept him young, it did. Mebbe, if they'd let him alone, he could live for ever thataway . . ." The lipless mouth receded from the black, gangrenous gums. "But no—they druv him off. He and his three sons and his three daughters had to skedaddle for their lives! They come here . . . they settled down . . ."

The cyclops filled his mug and drained it at a gulp, his eye shining bright.

"Yeah," he rasped, "but soon the cold come again . . . The ole man needed blood. He tried to git his youngest son—but the scound'el took the knife away f'm him, stabbed him daid, cut off his haid, sculped him, and hung it at the belt! The murderin' whelp!"

I stared, transfixed at the glaring rage suddenly contorting that evil face. It subsided slowly. "You," I ventured timidly, "you are all his descendants?"

"Yeah. His chillen ma'ied 'mongst themselves, and *their* chillen ma'ied 'mongst themselves, I reckon. Later on mebbe there was an Injun gal or two to mix with. But not often. It's been mostly—jest us!"

My gorge rose. These amorphous creatures, a self-sustaining

breed of compounded incests, had miraculously existed century after century through deepening shadows of insanity, through successive generations of horror and deformity, alone, shunned by the world, isolated from civilization, fit only for death!

A sudden weird mewing in the next room snatched up my shocked attention. I stared at the opening of the chamber. My eyes slowly lowered to the Thing that appeared on the floor.

Rolling, squirming, writhing its way out of the opening was a naked, armless, legless, eyeless, earless Thing. It paused on the threshold, as if it sensed our presence, mewed once, like a frightened kitten, then continued its weirdly painful progress until it reached the door. The cyclops got up, opened the door, and it rolled out.

I rose, nauseated. Through the wide-open doorway I could see that the shadows had lengthened considerably; that, in fact, time had passed so swiftly that it was nearly twilight. The idea of spending the night here, which I'd originally entertained, now left me trembling.

"Let's get on down to the Keep!" I cried. "Let's get on down. I want to see these things, buy them if I can, and leave!"

The cyclops licked the edge of his mouth with a thick, coal-black tongue. I shoved some bills into his hand and we both sallied forth into the deepening dusk, walking briskly to the brook and following it down into the sink.

"Buy them!" the cyclops kept hissing to himself with thoughtful glee. "Buy them—and leave!" He seemed to mouth the words as if they tasted good.

As we approached the old mill I was struck with the similarity of its design with that of several old castles of Norman vintage that I had seen in England. The silent mill-wheel hung motionless on its broken, rust-eaten axis, the swift waters of the stream breaking about it futilely. As we came more closely toward the old mill house I was struck by the strength of the chemical vapors that swirled into my nostrils. I stopped, half suffocated.

The cyclops clutched my arm, grinning. "Come on," he

snarled, "come on." We stumbled to the bottom of that dank, mephitic pit, waded across the brook, and stepped across the threshold into the open doorway of Kobold's Keep.

Its interior was a revelation. Though laden and crusted with filth, everything was, perhaps, as the owner had left it unknown centuries ago. The spacious chambers were timbered with Gothic arches and ornamented with gargoyles of wood. The furniture was of an undetermined period. Certainly it antedated any of the so-called "period" furniture that we recognize today—and antedated it, I'll swear, by centuries. As I scuffed through the strange and ancient old house a feeling that was nearly awe encompassed me. If the story of old Robin Kobolder's voyage to the New World could be authenticated a new chapter would be added to American history!

At first I was suspicious of the extraordinary state of preservation of the woodwork and, especially, of certain stiff damask draperies I saw still hanging there. I am now convinced, however, that these objects are entirely authentic. And the most reasonable conjecture I can offer as to their preservation is that the strong chemical exhalations rising from the ground have served as an effective bactericide, halting the process of decomposition through the centuries.

Presently I found myself in a large, nearly empty room, whose paneless windows gaped upon the teetering millwheel and the yawning pit into which the brook vanished. It had been, apparently, an armorer's workshop. A few blades of ancient design and all rust yet hung precariously on the walls. Glancing about, I perceived the huge bronze blade of a battle-ax hanging, edge downward like a guillotine, over the lintel of the door I had just entered. A black stain crusted the greater part of its surface.

A splintering crash!

I spun around, my heart beating wildly. The cyclops stood there, grinning at me, winking that ghastly eye of his. But when I saw what he had done my fright gave way to swift anger. He'd smashed one of those priceless chairs to fragments!

"You damned fool!" I yelled. "What did you do that for?"

And, like a hen gathering in a lost chick, I fell on my knees and gathered together the pieces of the chair tenderly.

The cyclops shrugged. "We'll be needin' a fire, I reckon. We gotta have firewood!"

An authentic Fifteenth Century chair—firewood!

I warned him to keep his hands off the furniture while I prowled about.

The book lay on a huge work table near the center of the room. It was a Bible, all right—a Caxton Bible! My eyes devoured its priceless pages, my fingers infinitely tender, infinitely reverent. God! To find such a treasure in this dismal, miasmic hole, alone, uncared for! Suddenly I was aware of the crackle of flames. I glanced up—leaped to my feet with an oath.

The deformed wretch had built a fire on the ancient hearth with the broken pieces of the chair!

I aimed a blow at his blinking eye, but he ducked and skipped away nimbly, hissing like a frightened adder. But the flames had completely engulfed the fragments. It was too late to save them . . . The dancing flames painted eery chiaroscuros of scarlet light and stygian shadows on the walls.

I was suddenly aware how late it had grown. So engrossed had I been in the book that night had already slipped over the Devil's Millhop like a swift-flowing black melena, catching me unawares.

To be forced to spend the night in this mephitic hermitage was no pleasant prospect. But the book provided consolation. I sat cross-legged on the floor near the fire, and read it slowly, critically, picking my way, as you may well imagine, with sheerest delight through its ornate typography.

The cyclops sat on his haunches beside me, his glistening eye pondering the flames hungrily.

How long I sat there wading through the pages of Caxton's Bible I cannot say. Suddenly I was aware of a strange sound—a squeaking and a thrashing, as of badly greased machinery stirring to activity. Simultaneously there came a slow, crunching,

grinding sound that shook the house in every rafter. It seemed to come from directly beneath me.

I leaped to my feet, scuttled to the window and peered out.

The ancient mill-wheel was turning! Slowly, at first, it began to pick up speed even as I stared and soon was spinning industriously, the blinding moonlight catching the spray dancing from its paddles like spume of liquid silver.

Puzzled and, I must admit, scared by this inexplicable event, I turned to the cyclops—and found him on his feet, facing me, a long, curving blade of oriental design clenched in one fist. “Where did you get that?” I rasped, startled.

“Funny thing,” he grinned horridly, “but it was a-lyin’ right there where I was a-settin’.”

The firelight scintillated on the bright steel. “It doesn’t look so very old,” I commented, more to myself than anyone else.

The black gums bared. “I reckon it ain’t so old. Only a mite over four hundred years, I reckon. This is the knife that old Kobold’s whelp used to sculp his old dad—and to cut off his haid! Feel that edge.”

He extended the blade to me. I drew back.

The cyclops cackled mockingly, “Gran’pap Kobold, he warn’t feared of man nor devil!” The eye winked confidentially. “He’d as soon slit your throat as look at ye. That’s the kind of man *he* was! Ironfisted! He couldn’t be puttin’ up with the law. ‘Cause he was the law hisself! That’s why he come across the water. Not that he wanted to much, I reckon!” His laugh rattled through the room like loose bones. “But y’ can’t do much when the Devil sends a storm that blows ye across!”

The cyclops laughed hissing and spat into the fire. His gaze swung back to my face with a sudden intensity.

“But, like I tol ye, he was a-needin’ new blood . . . new blood . . . The cold was a-creepin’ into his bones.” His taloned fingers curved and slowly clenched.

As I stared into that writhing face glistening with sweat, it seemed to take on a glow, an uncanny, greenish aura. The slack

chin seemed to strengthen, to grow heavier, and in those grotesque, shriveled features burned a mad, brutal virility!

"But they caught him one night!" The cyclops' voice clattered with a harsh note of fury. A chill malaise crept over me as I stared into that terrible visage. "They caught him!" the cyclops snarled. "They caught him and drove him out! And we run, my boys and my three daughters—we run! And then—"

The great burning eye closed slowly. And as I stared in sick horror it seemed that it was not really an eye at all. No—no eye at all, but a swollen scar—a scar from whose ends stretched two finer, dead-white lines that completely encircled the base of his scalp—the mark of the scalper's knife!

"The young scound'el stabbed me!" the horror roared in a strange, deep voice—a voice that I heard as if through a vast stretch of space and time. "He stabbed me!" he screamed madly.

I stared into the sunken blank walls of flesh covering the eyesockets. And, even as I stared, they lifted and I was gazing into a pair of mad, burning, red-rimmed eyes.

The knife flashed, and before my very eyes the creature had slashed his own throat, sawing the knife back and forth until the head dropped off, hit the floor, and rolled across the boards. I stared at it as if in a dream. I remember vividly an instant of crowning horror when the head, as it came to rest on the floor, looking at me, closed one eye in a ribald wink.

How I got out of that accursed house, across the moonlit crater, up the face of the cliff, and back to civilization is a confused nightmare of terror and madness. I can recall only flashes of my mad flight—the gibing creaking of the spinning millwheel, the dull crash of some heavy object as I fled from the room—an object that brushed my coat-tails as I passed under the door-lintel—the goblin laughter of the brook, the searing pain of my hands and knees as I tore them on the cruel cliff rocks, the eerie moonlight sifting through a forest . . . gasping stumbling, falling, plunging forward—ever forward . . . and, by some unfathomed miracle, the vision of a road sign which read in the

bright moonlight: "You are Now Entering the City of Merlin. Go slow."

I woke up the filling-station keeper. He didn't seem very surprised to see me. His jaundiced grin swept me once; then, not waiting to hear my gasping explanations, he led me to a room—the room I am writing this letter in . . .

It's no use trying to sleep. Sleep takes me back there . . . The eye of the cyclops . . . the bleeding head . . . the ribald wink . . .

If all these things are but the figments of a diseased mentality then I suppose I should be put away . . . Maybe they didn't happen . . . Maybe I'm crazy . . .

I see dawn breaking over the hills. As soon as it gets a bit lighter I'm going to post this letter via the first bus.

Then I'm going to get in my car and drive like mad out of this accursed country!

Faithfully yours,
Robert Darnley.

* * * * *

The following newspaper clipping was included by Mr. Abiathar Hall with the manuscript of Mr. Darnley's letter:

May 5, 1936—The body of a man believed to be Robert Darnley, a professional art collector, was found in the wreckage of his automobile about three miles north of Merlin, Tenn. The car, which had sheared off a number of telegraph poles, had evidently been traveling at a high rate of speed. Glass from the shattered windshield had completely decapitated the body.



BRIDE OF THE WIND

by Stephen Goldin

(author of *For Services Rendered*)

STEPHEN GOLDIN seems to have made a hit with you, the readers, with his as-yet-nameless performer of Special Services, as introduced in our issue No. 31, February 1970. Like your editor, Mr. Goldin prefers to go outside the well-worked mythologies of Greece, Rome, and Scandanavia — as well as the no-less overworked Balkan folklore — for his super-normal adventures. Further stories in the series are in preparation.

IT WAS IN BIELEFELD that a girl came into the Shop. She was tall and lean, blonde, and very pale. I doubted whether she could have been more than eighteen years old.

“May I help you?” I asked politely.

She bit her lower lip, and looked at me with her blue eyes widened. Her hands were shaking nervously. “I . . . I think so. That is, I’m not sure . . .” She spoke German with a provincial flavor.

“Don’t be afraid of me,” I told her. “I won’t harm you if you give me no reason. Just tell me why you’ve come.”

“I . . . I didn’t want to.”

“Nonsense! You wouldn’t have walked through that door unless something were seriously bothering you. I’d like to help

you solve your problem, but I can't if you don't tell me what it is."

The girl thought that over. "It's . . . you see, I have these dreams."

I looked her over again in reappraisal: Young, shy, probably quite romantic by nature; she could very well be a Dreamer. "What do you dream about?" I asked.

"It's awful. I'm riding on a horse in a storm, and I'm being chased by all kinds of dragons and snakes. I keep crying for help, but nobody hears me."

"Many people have nightmares," I said. "Why did you come to me?"

"I . . . I've had this dream now every night for the past two weeks. Then, last night, I felt a message, a compulsion that I had to come here to see you. I don't know why, or who told me, but somehow I just had to come. What does this all mean?"

I was beginning to see the picture. This girl herself wasn't a true Dreamer, although she probably had the potential for it. She was, instead, in touch with someone else, someone who couldn't get in touch with me directly and had to work through an intermediary. I told the girl as much. "What do we do now?" she asked.

"Now I have to get into direct contact with whomever is sending you these dreams to find out what they want." I searched the shelves that lined the walls of the Shop until I found the container I wanted. "Drink this," I told her, handing her the bottle.

"Wh-what is it?"

"Something to make you sleep." The liquid was actually a trance inducing drug, but "sleep" has better connotations, and I didn't want her to panic. "If the only way we can talk to this person is through your dreams, you'll have to be asleep."

She took the bottle hesitantly, still a flicker of fear in her eyes. "Go ahead," I coaxed. "It won't hurt you. You want to be rid of these nightmares, don't you?"

She drank, and moments later slumped to the floor. I knelt beside her. Her breathing was deep at first, stopped suddenly,

then continued at an accelerated rate. "Help me!" she cried. Her voice was no longer girlish, but carried the tones of a much more mature woman.

"Tell me who you are," I commanded.

"I am the bride of the Wind," the woman's voice moaned.

I'd thought the girl's description of her nightmare sounded familiar. Now I recalled where I'd heard it. Long ago, there was in Germany a lady who was a very fine huntress and horsewoman. She would ride to her hunts, trampling over any farms, fields and gardens that lay in her path. When she died, the Wind chose her as a wife, and now she was the hunted, chased by serpents and dragons.

"What do you want of me?" I asked.

"Help!" the voice screeched hoarsely.

"How should I help you?"

"Release me from this horror. Let me rest my soul in peace."

I considered it. Her plea seemed genuine, and I never refuse a cry for help. But I would need the Wind's consent for such an undertaking, something I had little likelihood of receiving. The Wind could be a difficult adversary, but I relished the challenge.

"Very well," I said. "I shall try."

I went into the back room of the Shop and took down my sword and scabbard. Neither looks very imposing. The blade is about two and a half feet long and keen-edged, but unpolished. There are no jewels encrusted on the hilt or scabbard — I despise ostentation. My blade is strictly for fighting, and I have found it to perform quite well that way.

I rubbed liniment all over my body, for dragon-slaying is a tiresome business at best, and lay down on the cold floor. My breathing deepened, my heart slowed. There was the familiar, body-tearing wrench, and my spirit separated from my body. I blinked in the bright light of the second sphere, stood up, and involuntarily took stock, as I always do, of my new surroundings. Objects in the real world always look indistinct when seen from the second sphere. I was surrounded by dusky shadows and intangible walls that made up the Shop.

I walked back out into the front room. I could make out the body of the girl, still in a trance, as a misty figure on the floor. I bent over her and, taking the pendant of the Angel in Black from around my neck, waved it over her body. The pendant captured the excess spiritual aura that was hovering over her and transferred it to me. I put the pendant back around my neck and set off to track down the bride of the Wind.

It was an indefinite time later that I came to the Garden where I supposed she would be. It was not a very appealing place. The scent of decay hung heavily around it, the reek of dead things and the musky odor of unclean living ones assailed my nostrils, forcing me to cough. My cough seemed to be a signal for the Garden's inhabitants to begin their cacophonous symphony. Cackles, screeches, growls and groans of every description echoed from the tangle of gray-green foliage before me. Now a shriek like a taut violin string reached my ears; now the half-laughing, half-sobbing wail of some fiendish hyena split the air; now the ferocious growl of some fearful predator warned of its hunt; and always, the sharp, hideous hissing of countless numbers of snakes, slithering through the slimy underbrush, tasting the air with their darting forked tongues.

I entered the Garden. The plants and high grass brushed roughly against my thighs, seeming to grab at me as though to either push me back or draw me farther in. Small, unseen animals skittered about under my very feet. I paid them no heed. The way ahead grew darker as the giant ferns seemed to spring up around me, grabbing selfishly for the sunlight. My sword hung easily at my side as I walked.

There was a warning hiss behind me. I whirled, sword drawn, and sliced the head off the muddy-brown serpent that had been coiled there, ready to strike. Blood gushed from its body, the tongue still flickered from the severed head. The garden grew deathly quiet all around. A challenge had been hurled and accepted. The battle, I could feel, would soon begin.

There was the ringing in my ears that you only hear when there is a complete absence of sound. I stood with my knees slightly crouched, ready to leap in any direction. My hand

tightened on the hilt of my sword. Then, with a whinny, a fleeting form burst into view.

I could not have guessed at the woman's age. Her body was full, her face was handsome. Her long yellow hair streamed wildly behind her as she rode. Her eyes were wide with fear, her red lips parted. Her chest heaved massively as she struggled to breathe against the paralyzing terror she felt.

Her mount, also, was quite exceptional. The horse was totally black except for his eyes, which stood out like two glowing coals in a darkened fireplace. His shoulder was more than twenty hands high, and his long legs looked built for speed. His short mane fairly flew behind him as he knifed through the night.

I had but the barest moment to observe such details, for they were gone almost before they had come. I raised my sword now, preparatory to fighting, for the dragon who must be chasing them could not be far behind.

Then came a bellow, the likes of which have frozen hearts the world over, as the dragon came into view. Over fifty feet long, its reptilian body flew on misleadingly small wings. Its eyes were golden dinnerplates, its nostrils twin furnaces, capable of melting even the most stolid of foes. Its legs were thick and grotesque, hanging awkwardly from its huge and bulky body. Its pointed tail whipped viciously from side to side as it flew, slicing through a palm tree as though it were a willow-wand. And its mouth was like a monstrous cavern, lined with rows of calcium stalagmites and stalactites like scimitars, waiting to grind into digestible scraps whatever insignificant morsels of meat should chance to fall within the grasp of its claws.

The dragon saw me and, knowing at once that I was its enemy, came straight for me. I dodged a stream of flame and moved up near the soft underbelly. I lunged forward, sword held high. The monster backed off just in time to avoid being stabbed, simultaneously swinging its sharp tail. The pointed edge missed me, but I was struck on the side by part of the flattened blade, and I staggered to regain my balance.

The dragon snarled and reached for me with one crooked claw. My sword zipped through the air at it. I was lucky—the edge of

my blade cut into the dragon's palm. The beast roared like thunder in an angry storm. I smiled as I saw some blood from the cut dripping out onto my cold steel blade, for I knew that a sword smeared with dragon's blood becomes an almost invincible weapon.

But the battle was far from over. The monster shot more fire, burning me this time on the right side. I winced as the flame seared into my flesh. I whipped around and sliced my sword into its nose, and the reinforced steel again drew blood. Once more the anguished shrieks shook the earth. The dragon lanced its tail at me again; it hit me savagely behind my left knee, and I rolled to the ground, the tendons cut in that leg.

The dragon, sensing victory, scooped me up in one scaly claw. I was powerless to resist. I was lifted up to the foul-smelling mouth with its rows of razor-sharp teeth. The lizard tongue darted out at me. With a single motion of the wrist, I swept my sword through it, severing the tongue completely.

Blood gushed forth, so much that it nearly drowned me. I was quickly covered from head to foot with the tepid, salty liquid. The dragon dropped me in its pain, and I fell hard some fifteen feet back to the ground. I landed on my left leg, which sent a ball of white-hot fire coursing through my body as it buckled beneath me. The throbbing was so great that I nearly collapsed then and there. My temples were pulsing; my leg felt as though a team of welders were trying to melt it with their torches; my eardrums were virtually split from the dragon's screams, and my head was spinning so violently that it was impossible to maintain any sense of direction.

I rose unsteadily, leaning heavily on my right leg. The dragon, if anything, looked in worse shape than I was. It was evidently weakening from its loss of blood, which was still spurting profusely from its mouth. Its tail, rather than lashing, was twitching spasmodically, and its head weaved drunkenly as if trying, like myself, to regain some of its equilibrium. Its wings beat feebly in a vain attempt to get it off the ground again, possibly to flee.

I hopped over to it. The dragon swung its head and snapped at

me, but I lunged forward and avoided the monstrous and still dangerous teeth. I jabbed my sword up to the hilt into the soft region at the underpart of the dragon's neck. This was the death blow. Blood flowed from this wound like a river to the sea, forming little lakes and puddles all about the body. The dragon let out its dying scream, a sound unequalled in ferocity or strength even in the second sphere, where horror and ferocity are the keywords.

I hobbled away as fast as I could, so as not to be crushed by the tremendous weight as the dragon collapsed for the last time. Even so, the impact of that gigantic body hitting the ground set up vibrations and shock waves that rocked the entire Garden and knocked my one good leg out from under me.

Then silence again. I picked myself up and limped back to the dead dragon, its green hulk lying very still in the high vegetation. A yellow butterfly came out of the tall grass and alighted gently on the side of that once-mighty creature. I retrieved my sword and put it back in my scabbard. I stood ankle deep in a pool of the dragon's blood, wishing with part of my mind that I'd had containers with me to collect some of that precious fluid.

It was some time before any other noises rivalled in strength the beating of my heart.

A horse snorted behind me, and I turned slowly to face the Wind's bride. She looked at my wounds and said all she could say. "Thank you."

"You're not free yet," I reminded her. "You are still bound to the Wind, unless I can persuade him to release you. Such a task is likely to be more difficult than slaying any dragons."

At that, I heard the Wind. His voice materialized all about me, tauntingly soft and humming. "Why do you wish to steal my wife from me?" he whispered.

I was not deceived by his gentleness. "You are obviously holding this poor spirit against her will," I said. "You have tortured her beyond anything she may have deserved. True, she was once a scourge to the farmers of her land, riding carelessly over their fields, but any anguish she has caused, she has gained

with interest. It is time, I believe, that you should let her rest."

"And you have come here to liberate her. Do you really think you can?"

"Yes," I said, trying to project the confidence I didn't completely feel.

The Wind howled. "Then we shall fight for her. The winner does with her what he will."

"That sounds fair. If I defeat you, she goes free. I have your Word on that?"

"Of course. Only you will not defeat me. Instead, I shall destroy you completely. Then I shall deal with my wife for bringing you into this private affair."

"And I may use whatever weapons I choose?" I persisted.

"Naturally," laughed my opponent. "All weapons are equally useless against my supreme power."

I unstrapped my sword from my side and placed it on a nearby rock, for I knew that steel, no matter how well tempered, could not even scratch my foe. In fact, I knew of only one weapon that could defeat the Wind—or at least, I hoped it could.

"I am ready," I said.

At that, the Wind rose into battle. I was lifted off the ground as a toy is lifted by a playful child. I spun rapidly as the Wind whirled me around. Then, in an attempt to end our duel quickly, the Wind tried to dash me against the ground. I transformed myself into a bird and glided lightly to earth.

My opponent was not dismayed by my opening defense. Instead, he increased in strength, and I was again lifted into the face of so strong a gale that not even an eagle could fly accurately. I was whirled at a dizzying rate. The Garden seemed to spin wildly beneath me. A strong, sudden gust appeared from nowhere to drive me against a tree. Before I hit, I transformed myself again, this time to a soft leaf, and gripped the tree as I came to it.

Harder yet the Wind blew, and cold. Now it was an Arctic wind, that chills one just to hear it. No longer playful, it was a wind that could lose men mercilessly in some swirling snow, numb their skins to the point of death, then freeze the blood in

their very veins. It was an angry wind that blew in the cold fury of indignation at the thought that so small a challenger as myself would dare oppose it.

Back and forth I was blown, almost as though the Wind could not decide which way to best destroy me. Back, forth, around, up, down. And all the while a pitiless shriek cut into my very being, setting up painful vibrations right through my soul.

Below me now was a rocky shore. The Wind, spying a razor-sharp crag, hurled me against it, hoping to rip my leaf-transformation to shreds. Then I made my third, and most difficult, transformation: a pebble. I bounced, unharmed, off the rock.

There seemed no end to the Wind's rage now. High into the sky was I raised, and down almost to the ground was I dashed. I whirled through cyclones, I sped through jetstreams. Balmy tropical breezes tried to softly seduce me to false security, then frozen gales battered me all but senseless. I was hurled at rocks, buildings, waterfalls as the Wind tried every trick he knew to shatter me. Around the world I was swept at lightening speeds; over fields and mountains, seas and streams, deserts and cities, jungles and tundra. The Wind was combing the globe, looking desperately for a way to rid itself of me.

But even the Wind, mighty though he may be, does not possess infinite endurance. At first, the change was not evident, but eventually it became clearer that my adversary was exhausting his powers. Cyclones reduced themselves to whirlwinds which, in turn, devolved to harmless eddies. Gales became breezes, then feeble gusts. At length, I was dropped almost gently back amid the high grass of the Garden.

"I cannot destroy you," the Wind confessed. "Now you may try whatever tricks you think you have to destroy me."

"I cannot destroy you," I admitted, returning to my own shape as I spoke.

"Then we are at a stalemate," cried the Wind triumphantly. "Since no one has won or lost, things must remain as they were. My wife shall stay with me."

"On the contrary," I said quietly. "I have won."

The Wind roared, anger plainly evident in his tones. "What trickery is this?"

"No trickery. You boastfully claimed you would destroy me. Yet you have just now admitted failure."

"But you, in turn, did not destroy me. How can you then claim victory?"

"I did not say I would destroy you," I replied. "I said I would *defeat* you. By preventing my own destruction, I have thwarted your avowed aims, thereby *defeating* you."

An anguished wail arose as the Wind saw my meaning. "You cheated me!"

"Not at all. You said that I could use any weapons I wanted. I chose the greatest weapon of all—the power of words." As my opponent was already in an aggrieved state, I kept to myself a pun about fighting the Wind with wind.

"Very well," the Wind conceded bitterly. "You have won this time. But I shall never forget your duplicity. Someday, perhaps, I shall have the chance to avenge myself. Do you hear me?"

I totally ignored his threat and turned, instead, to his now-freed bride. "You may go now," I said, "and do with yourself as you will."

"It seems I must always be thanking you," she said, her eyes brightened by diamond tears. "What payment do you require?"

I looked again at her steed. The embers of his eyes seemed to explode out of the ebony of his body. I could sense within him a spirit with exceptional fire.

"I should like your horse for my breeding stock," I told her. "You should no longer be having need of him anyway."

She agreed to my price, and we parted company. I led the horse to the stable beneath the Shop and made a mental note to tend to him at my earliest opportunity. Then, with great reluctance, I went back to rejoin my body, which was lying, as I had left it, on the cold floor of the back room.

The reuniting of body and spirit was accomplished with the same loss of freedom I always feel at such times. Then I stood up and went out into the Shop. The girl was still on the floor in her

trance. Her facial expression as she slept was enough to dispel any doubts I might have had as to her potential as a Dreamer. I woke her and told her I had settled her problem.

"Do I owe you anything?" she asked hesitantly.

"No. As it really wasn't you who had the problem and as I've already been paid, you don't owe me anything."

She muttered a hasty *danke schon* and started out of the Shop.

"But you do owe something to yourself," I continued.

She stopped. "What do you mean?"

"You have a potential," I explained, "for a gift which many I know would give all they have to possess. It could remain only a potential, or it may develop of its own accord. You yourself can help bring it out. There is a training procedure that I can teach you. It is not easy, but the benefits are enormous."

She instinctively felt the truth in my words. "Y-yes," she stammered, "I would like to be trained."

I smiled and nodded. The human race can always use another Dreamer.



A Song of Defeat

by Robert E. Howard

We are they

Who must forever sing the songs of defeat.
Our souls go robed in dun and sombre gray
And all the roads are broken under our feet.

Suns burn in crimson thunder down the west,

Reddening the blooms that Fate's black Titan picks;
But charring skeletons inside our breast,
Each blackened sunset hangs — a crucifix.

Not Christ alone was butchered on a Tree,

We have tasted fruits of deadly Eucharists —
We have followed the roads that lead to a shoreless sea
And our feet are bound in the hells of Silence and mists.

We have not known the conqueror's trumpet song,

Ours is the briny cup of salt despair;
Not ours the laurel or the chanting throng —
We have fastened flowers of Death in our dank hair.

Ask not of the glories of dawns that have gone before;

The sunrise dreams are gone from our empty eyes —
The lines are down — the crimson sabres gore —
Ours the songs of defeat as starlight dies.

Ask not that bugle-voiced we once could sing
The riding song, the chantson, and the boast —
The years are a sluggard moth a wasp can sting,
And we were born to fall before the Host.

For we are they that are born to songs of defeat —

The cup of gall and wormwood was our first drink —
Like ants we waver on Eternity's brink
And cry on God in vain for a winding sheet.

THE EMERGENCY CALL

by Marion Brandon

MARIAN BRANDON is a name which appears twice on the contents page of the Clayton *STRANGE TALES*, and then disappears, so far as our field of fiction is concerned. For a change of pace, try this quiet tale of a cry for help and the answer that came to it.

AS THE OLD WHITE ELM-SHADED HOUSE came into view at the turn of the road, I found myself trembling. "That's it, Tom," I said.

"There's no doctor's sign on it," Tom remarked as he brought the car to a halt at the picket gate. "Sure it's the right one?"

"Quite sure," I answered as well as my quivering lips would let me. For Tom's first thought in planning our wedding-anniversary trip had been a visit to this house—and I knew what he would find out! I hadn't been able to tell him myself. How would the knowledge affect him, coming from another?

With a sinking heart I watched him make his way along the red brick path to the white door, pull the brass bell-knob that I remembered so well, shining now in warm afternoon sunlight instead of the blue flare of lightning. A woman answered his summons, a young pretty woman, in place of the deaf old soul of a year ago. There was a brief conversation that I couldn't hear; and Tom came slowly back to the car.

"He's dead, darling!" he said. "The end of last July, she told me. Must have been right after we were here; that was the twenty-sixth, you know. She's no relation to him; they just bought the place in the fall; and when I asked her the exact date he died she didn't know."

She didn't know! My overstrained nerves gave away under the reaction. I burst into tears.

Tom was beside me in a moment, his arms around me. "Don't cry darling!" he remonstrated. "You know he said himself that he hadn't been well for a long time, and he's probably better off as he is. But, darn it!" he added in the boyish way that he has. "I surely wanted to thank him for what he did for us, and never anything that even looked like a bill!"

"It—it just upset me, Tom," I whispered, controlling myself as best I could.

Tom kissed me; and we drove on, leaving behind us the old green-shuttered house, every detail of which will remain forever burned into my memory. But the mere sight of it brought everything back so vividly that, now that we are home again, I am writing out this account of as strange an experience as can possibly befall a human being.

But I must go back to that July evening, a year ago, when I knelt, terrified and alone in the sunset light, beside Tom's unconscious form, his blood warm and wet on my fingers, ominous mutterings of approaching thunder in my ears.

We were on our wedding-trip, and had been avoiding traveled highways in favor of remote country backroads like this one. It was a dreadful road, on which we had encountered no settlement—not even a house—for miles; but the mountain

country through which it struggled was glorious. The ascent of the last hill, however, had made the radiator boil, and we had stopped to let it cool.

And then I saw the flower.

To this day, I don't know what it was; but it looked as if a little piece of summer sky had been caught in a bunch of green leaves high above the road on the face of the rocky wall that rose steep and sheer on one side.

"Tom, did you ever see anything so lovely as that flower?" I asked.

Tom's gray eyes followed my pointing finger. "I'll get it for you," he said.

"Tom, you couldn't!" In saying that, of course, I made a bad mistake.

"Couldn't I?" Tom retorted. "We'll see!"

As a matter of fact there was plenty of foothold on the jagged rock-face, we found; and quite a wide ledge just below the spot where the flower stood out in its blue loveliness against the gray-green lichenized face of the rock.

"You want a rock-garden, darling," Tom said with his dear teasing smile. "Watch me capture the first inmate!"

There is no use going into details. It makes me sick now even to write of the hideous splitting crash with which the ledge, probably weakened by weathering, gave away under Tom's weight . . . and the more hideous silence which succeeded it.

Tom lay queerly crumpled and still at the bottom, made no movement, uttered no sound. As I dropped to my knees beside him, I could see that his head was resting on a broken piece of rock, as on a pillow. When I moved it, my fingers were warm and wet—and red. His face was ghastly in the failing light, his eyes closed.

"Tom!" I begged. "Can't you speak to me?"

But my only reply was an ominous rumble of thunder.

I looked back over the valley behind me. Great ragged black clouds were rolling up from the horizon, obscuring in a heavy pall the golden light of the sunset. As I watched, they were rent

by a jagged flash of lightning. A drop of rain fell cold on my hand, another on Tom's death-white face.

"Help!" I screamed, hysterically and senselessly. "Help!"

But even through my blind panic, I knew that there was no help. The country was probably as desolate ahead of us as it had been behind.

Another flash of lightning? another roll of thunder, booming hollowly among the hills, nearer this time. The rain was falling in earnest.

Sheer terror finally brought me to my senses, contradictory as that sounds. Tom wasn't dead. I could still feel his heart-beats, so irregular and faint as to make it only too plain that the dividing line between life and death was pitifully thin. And if, in his shocked condition, he were to be drenched and chilled by the impending downpour . . .

I didn't dare to think further. Desperation must have lent me superhuman strength, for somehow I managed to get Tom's big helpless body—he is six feet high, and heavy in proportion—into the car which I backed as close to him as I could.

I was exhausted and trembling when the task was accomplished, and with Tom's senseless form lying inert and still on the floor in the back, I could only crouch sobbing on the front seat while such a storm as I hope never to see again broke over us.

It raged for hours, with crashing thunder and such blinding lightning and sluicing rain that I didn't dare to attempt to move the chainless car along the road which looked more like the bed of a mountain stream than anything else in the uncanny blue glare of the lightning flashes.

At long last, however, the downpour ceased. The storm passed on, but reluctantly, leaving in its wake fitful flashes and intermittent growls of thunder. With shaking fingers, I padded the flooring under Tom's head with my coat and sweater, in addition to what I had already put there, and slipping once more into the front seat, started the engine.

The trip along the dark treacherous road seemed endless—a nightmare of skids and side-slips; of jolts that brought my heart

to my throat when I thought of Tom's head. In reality the speedometer showed only four miles, and my watch forty-five minutes, when I finally spied a house, withdrawn and lonely-looking. But at last, the weak lamplight in the windows meant people.

But they could do me no good. They had no telephone to call a doctor; nor, they added, had any other of the few scattered houses in the vicinity.

"You'd best push right on to Colmer, ma'am," the man advised me. "It isn't but six miles from here, and there's a doctor. There's one village between here and it; but there's no doctor there—now. More's the pity!"

Could I possibly get Tom there alive? I thought miserably as I started once more into the darkness. His fluttering heart-beats were almost imperceptible.

In my daze of utter misery I noticed nothing, thought of nothing but making the best speed I dared, until the widely scattered houses drew close enough together to make me realize that we were approaching a settlement.

"The one where there isn't a doctor!" I thought wretchedly as the better roadway gave me confidence to press down a little more on the accelerator. But at least there would be telephones!

Just then a dying flash of lightning illuminated the front of a house on the left, and flickered wanly across a brass plate by the door. Jamming on the brakes so that the car skidded entirely around, I leaped to the ground and ran up the path.

"Dr. Barton," read the sign in the light from the glass side-panels of the door.

"Thank God!" I sobbed in my relief and surprise, as I pulled at the old-fashioned bell. Apparently I had been too sunk in my misery to notice the little intermediate settlement; no wonder, if it was as small and straggling as some we had passed through! And this must be Colmer.

Everybody was evidently in bed and asleep; for the only light was the one in the hall, and there was no answer to my frantically repeated summons but the slow strokes of a clock booming the hour of midnight. I could hear the bell ringing quite

plainly; but in desperation I beat upon the door with my fists. That still figure out there on the car floor — dying!

As a last resort I tried the door. It gave! I stumbled into the long white-paneled hall. There was the scent of roses on the air.

"Is there nobody to help us?" I cried into the silence. "I *must* have help!"

Silence again for a moment. And then the door of the room on my left slowly opened, and a tall old man emerged. He had kind, yet penetrating, dark eyes and thick gray hair.

"What is the trouble, my dear?" he asked with a most reassuring sympathetic smile I had ever met. "I'm sorry you were not answered at once; but my housekeeper is stone deaf—and I had gone to sleep."

Incoherently I poured out my story.

"Bring your car into the drive," he directed briefly, "while I go and light up the office."

He was, as I have said, an old man; but he seemed to have the strength of Samson. For when I stopped the car at the door, he lifted Tom's big helpless form as easily as if it had been a baby's, and carrying it into the consulting room—to the right of the doorway, just opposite the one from which he had come in answer to my cry—and laid it on the examining-table.

With deft skilful-looking fingers he felt Tom's pulse; his body; his head . . . his pulse again.

"My dear," he said finally, "This boy"—the touch with which he moved Tom's curly dark head was very gentle—"is almost—gone." Desperately I gripped at the chairback behind me to keep from crying out against the awfulness of the verdict, so much worse now, coming as it did from the lips of one who undoubtedly knew! "We'll have to have an immediate operation—here and now," he added. "It's a bad basal fracture, and we haven't a minute to lose."

There and then, by a country general practitioner! As I heard the appalling words, the old-fashioned high-ceiled room seemed to reel around me, the lined kindly face of the old man to recede into a mist.

The speaker of them, however, appeared to regard the prospect as a perfectly simple matter.

"It's forty miles to the nearest hospital and surgeons," I could hear, as from some great distance, the quiet voice going on. "The boy wouldn't last the trip out, and the only doctors you'd find between here and there are my kind—country 'medicos.' "

"Have you ever—performed this operation?" I stammered through trembling lips.

"No," he replied simply, as if that didn't matter in the least; "never in my life."

For a moment stark unreasoning panic seized upon me at the thought of having that most dangerous of operations performed upon the person I loved far better than myself, here, in this country office, by someone who had never done it—and didn't seem to think that made any difference! The dreadful thought occurred to me that he might be insane. But as I met the direct dark eyes that were searching mine across Tom's well-nigh lifeless body, something of their calm cool steadiness seemed to flow into my cringing heart.

Tom was dying. The gray pallor, the sunken, pinched features, the heavy sweat-beads on his head and hands, made that hideously plain, even to me, who knew so little. Any chance was worth the trying!

"Please do it, Doctor," I said.

I shall not try to write about the next half hour. It is too hard, even now, after a year has passed. The grisly-seeming preparations . . . The rows of ugly little instruments laid out in cruel glistening array on a clean towel . . . The sponges and bandages in readiness.

"Fortunately I had everything laid out after my last emergency operation, a couple of days ago, so we won't have that to do now," the doctor remarked with his kindly smile as he hung his coat over the back of a chair, and shrugged himself into his white linen jacket, "And we shan't need ether," he added. "Even when this operation is successfully over, it's some little time before consciousness returns, so we'll be spared that delay, too! I'll just have you go out now." He was deftly shaving away

Tom's thick hair. "I'll call you if I need help. And this sort of thing isn't easy to watch!"

At the door I turned to look back. The rain was once more pouring in sheets down the window-panes, for the storm was returning. The picture is forever engraved on my memory: the bare orderly consulting-room, with its brilliant overhead light; the still figure on the table; the intent gray-haired one bending over it . . . the sudden gleam of a knife.

"Good-by, Tom, darling!" I whispered in my heart. And stumbling out into the hall, I dropped onto a chair beside the door.

The minutes dragged leadenly by. I couldn't even listen for movements in the lighted room, for the roar of the renewed downpour drowned every other sound, even when the long peals of thunder died away.

My teeth were soon chattering, for there seemed to be open windows somewhere. Yet I didn't dare move to look for them lest a call come for me to help in some way . . . And with the deepening chill, the scent of roses that I had noticed on my entrance became more pronounced. The doctor's hobby must be the growing of fine flowers, I thought—as one does think of trifles in dreadful moments.

At last the door opened, and the tall white-coated figure emerged.

"We'll be all right now, I think, my dear," he said with his benignant smile. "He's coming around nicely."

The terrible grayness was indeed leaving Tom's face, I saw, as I entered the room; his breathing, almost imperceptible before, was now plainly to be seen. He had been moved from the table to the big comfortable sofa that stood against the wall and warmly covered with blankets.

"How can I thank you, Doctor?" I stammered through my grateful tears.

"I don't need any thanks," he answered. "The effort to recall people from the gates of death to those who love them is its own great reward—especially a fine boy like this one!" He smiled again. "No one has ever been able to do me a greater favor than

bringing me a good hard emergency case to work on! . . . Yes; that pulse is coming along splendidly."

It was nearly an hour before Tom opened his eyes, clear and sane, for there had been no ether to confuse him.

"Gosh, darling!" he whispered weakly. "I certainly have a head on me! Did I hit something hard?"

"Not so chatty, young man!" broke in the doctor in his kindly way. "You've had a major operation on that head of yours, and it's up to you to keep quiet. I'll just give you something to take the edge off the pain."

"Thank you, sir," Tom said, as the hypodermic plunged into his arm.

"That will make him sleep for twelve hours at least," said the doctor as he pulled the blankets well up around Tom's shoulders. "The undertaker has a good ambulance, and you can get him in the morning to take you to the nearest city hospital; that's Hampton, forty miles from here. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll go back to sleep. I've had a long illness—and I have to rest."

I noticed then, for the first time, what I had failed to mark in my terror for Tom: the pallor of the handsome benevolent face, the shadows under the keen dark eyes.

"Oh, do go and rest, Doctor," I begged. "We'll be quite all right."

"Your hands are cold," Tom murmured sleepily, already under the influence of the quick-acting opiate. "Better cover up well."

"I'll be well covered," the doctor answered reassuringly. His pleasant smile took in both of us; but he stooped to lay a hand on Tom's shoulder for an instant before he passed out of the open door.

But he did not go upstairs, I noted with relief as I heard his retreating footsteps pass across the hall and into the room from which I had roused him. There was something about his calm, benevolent, and wholly reassuring presence that made me thankful to have him near.

Tom soon dropped into a heavy, drugged slumber. The night

wore on. Beside him, in a big chair, I half-dozed, worn out with the long strain. The storm had died; the house was very still.

Still; that is, except for a shade, or something, that was rattling continually in the room across the hall where there was evidently a window open. For myself, I didn't mind the creeping draft on my feet; but I hated to think that the tired doctor, resting after so delicate an operation, performed when he had been ill, might be roused from his slumber before long if the noise continued. But, half-asleep myself, it was almost dawn before it occurred to me that if I tiptoed quietly in and found and closed the window I could prevent his being disturbed.

Tom always carried a flashlight in his pocket; and by some strange chance it was quite uninjured by the fall.

Softly I made my way across the hall; softly opened the closed door. The cold air of the room was heavy and sweet with the scent of roses.

Cautiously I flashed the torch.

I was standing in a large old-fashioned parlor, with white-paneled walls and dark walnut furniture. It was the shade of the window directly across from me that was making the disturbance. As I started over to it, I moved the torch slowly around the room—and what I saw brought me to a sudden trembling stop.

Before the fireplace and within a yard of me a coffin was standing, its dark polished surface gleaming dully in the light of the torch. Around the trestle roses were banked, and fresh garden flowers, their odor sweet on the cold air of the room.

And the face on the satin pillow, calm and reposeful in the majesty of death, was the one that had bent so intently over Tom's motionless form, that had smiled so kindly upon both of us... so kind still that my impulse to turn and flee was immediately checked.

Incredulously I bent and touched the quietly folded hands. They were icy, with the chill that is not of the world of the living. Shaken and trembling, I dropped upon a chair, my mind a whirling tumult of confused emotion.

He was dead, that tall old man who had been—asleep; who had

been ill, and must rest; whose skilful hands, folded now in marble rigidity, had brought Tom back from the Gate which their owner had already passed

The room was still cold with the chill of the mountain air; the blind still rattled; the heavy odor of the flowers was well-nigh overpowering. But I was not afraid. Groping for the light switch, I flooded the silent place with radiance, and dropped on my knees beside the coffin.

"Thank you," I whispered as my tears fell fast on the quite hands that had saved my husband from the grave. "Oh, thank you—thank you!"

And for a long time I knelt there, awed and overcome by a sense of nearness to unseen things that pass human understanding.

With morning light the old housekeeper came down; she was stone deaf, as the doctor had said.

"My land, but you gave me a start!" she exclaimed as I met her at the foot of the stairs. "You'll have to write what you want to say," she added. "I can't hear a word, and I don't hold with those ear-phones and such."

She seemed quite satisfied with my explanation that my husband had been injured; that, seeing the doctor's sign, I had stopped at the house; and that, receiving no answer to my rings, and finding the door open, I had helped him into the surgery to wait till morning for the doctor.

"My, my! but it would just have suited the doctor!" she said. "Nothing he liked better than to be called up from a good sound sleep for something serious. A real doctor, *he* was! Dead in his bed yesterday morning . . . Good thing you didn't mistake the front parlor for the office," she added. "He's in there—at least, that's where the undertaker said he was going to put him when he brought him back last night, just as I was going to bed—and you might have got a scare . . . Though I guess he couldn't scare anyone if he still looks as peaceful as he did when I found him in the morning! I'll get you some breakfast before I go into see him." And the housekeeper hurried off toward the kitchen.

I told the same story to the undertaker when, in response to my telephoned summons, he arrived with his ambulance. What would they both have said, had I told the truth?

We were only a little more than a hundred miles from home, and he agreed to take us the whole distance for a sum which, to my city mind, seemed very reasonable indeed.

"The doctor's funeral isn't till tomorrow," he said; "so it's easy enough for me to go. I'll just step in and take a look around." And he disappeared into the closed room.

"Can you beat that!" he said as he emerged, an odd expression on his face. "That old housekeeper of his has always been fine at her job, but kind of queer in the head. He'd left a note saying that when he died, he didn't want a mourning affair made of it, and not to put a wreath on the door, or do things different in any way. So she wouldn't have anyone in to stay with her, because that would certainly be doing different. And when I came to fix things up in the parlor, just as she was going up to bed last night, she told me not to slip the spring-lock on the front door when I got through, because he'd never locked it in his life. But who in the world would have thought that she'd have the nerve to put his white office-coat on him instead of his best one that he hardly ever wore! She must have come down to look at him after I'd gone . . . And believe me," he added, "he looks a lot more like himself!"

For an instant dizziness forced me to close my eyes . . . That tall spare gray-haired figure, shaking itself into the linen jacket!

"Can there ever be a mistake about people being really dead?" I asked, striving to make my tone sound natural. "Could he perhaps be in some kind of trance, and have got up and wandered around—dazed?"

But even as I voiced the words, I realized the ridiculousness of them. "Wandering!" "Dazed!" Those keen searching dark eyes; those deft, sure hands; that superhuman strength!

"Mistakes can't be made about death any more," the man replied simply. "We have a test now that is absolutely certain. I don't think I'll say anything about it to her," he added, "I guess

people will like to see him just as he looked in the office. I'll just pretend I didn't notice anything."

Nor would the old woman who hadn't seen him in the other coat, notice anything!

On the long trip home, as I sat by Tom's unconscious form on the cot, I learned much about the good old doctor. A man who had loved his profession above everything else in the world, save one thing—his only son, who was to follow in his father's footsteps. The boy had finished medical school; and before beginning on his hospital internship, had gone away on a hunting trip with a friend. He had fractured his skull in a fall, and died before help could be obtained and the operation that would have saved him performed.

"It broke the doctor's heart, I guess," the undertaker went on. "The boy was all he had, for his wife died twenty years before. And from then on, you could see a little difference in how he felt about his cases. Not that he ever gave anyone anything but the best that was in him, of course; but when it came to young fellows like his boy — and this husband of yours — he'd have been glad to kill himself for them any day. He worked and slaved over them, and sat up nights with them. 'Just to make sure,' he'd say! It was overdoing over a young chap with pneumonia that took him off," he added. "He'd had angina for years, and knew he ought to be careful; but instead he worked over the youngster for fifteen hours straight—pulled him through, too— and then came home and went to sleep . . . for good!" The undertaker was quite unashamed of his emotion. "It certainly does seem queer," he added, "to think of a fine young fellow like this one needing his help—and him lying with his hands folded!"

What could I say to that? . . . Nothing!

Tom didn't rouse until after we reached the hospital. Though if he had talked, the undertaker would probably have taken what he said for delirious raving. To the surgeons who examined him, I simply said that it had been an emergency operation, performed by a country doctor.

What else could I have said?

It was a splendidly performed operation, they remarked; and

the results bore out their diagnosis. Tom improved rapidly and steadily, and in a far shorter time than I had dared to hope, was as well as ever.

But I have never told him what I alone have known, until my decision to tell it to others, in this fashion and under another name.

Nor have I any explanation—if explanations mean answers to “hows” and “whys.” I have heard it said, however, that after death the soul lingers for a time near the familiar body which housed it for so long. If that is true, and the soul of the good old doctor heard once more, in the silence of the night, the call for help that it had never in life refused, why shouldn’t it have been permitted to re-enter that body long enough to—answer?



The Reckoning

My score sheet this time shows an interesting pattern of blue zeros, indicating an “outstanding” vote; red numerals, indicating positive dislike; and the regular numberings from 1 to 5. One of the five stories received no dislike votes at all; that was the first part of the serial; another of the five received no outstanding votes at all; that was the Cornwall story. But none of the fives escaped one of the two extremes, and three received votes on both ends.

For the first three ballots, our new author was in the lead; the fourth tied Keller and Ernst with him. Then he forged ahead for a long spell of ballots, and it was not until close to the end that the winner passed him. Your comments have shown you want more stories about the Shop; there’s one in this issue, and another awaiting publication. I’ll get it in as soon as I can. Meanwhile, here’s how your votes rated the stories in our February issue (No. 31).

(1) Part One of *The Duel of the Sorcerers*, by Paul Ernst; (2) *For Services Rendered*, by Stephen Goldin; (3) *The Noseless Horror*, by Robert E. Howard; (4) *The Tailed Man of Cornwall*, by David H. Keller, M.D.; (5) *The Roc Raid*, by George B. Tuttle.

As I expected it would be, and like the Theodore Roscoe novelet in our December issue, *The Roc Raid* was controversial. But also, as I expected, those of you who enjoyed it, enjoyed it very much.

TALES FROM CORNWALL

by David H. Keller, M.D.

(author of *The Abyss, Heredity, etc.*)

No. 9 Feminine Magic

This is the last of the five chapters from the *Tales From Cornwall* in which Cecil, self-styled Overlord, is the principal character. You will see him once more in the next chapter, but near the end of his days, where the tales have taken another turn. The present episode has not been published before.

FOR TWO MONTHS AFTER MY MARRIAGE to the beautiful Leonora we were very happy. Naturally much of the time was spent in entertaining the nobility of Cornwall, all of whom, especially their womenfolk, were more than curious to see their new queen in daylight. Her mysterious appearance had taken place in the soft moonlight and of course there were a hundred versions of exactly what had happened. But all my subjects agreed that her remarkable arrival from the Celestial Paradise which she hight her home was of the same magical nature which had savored all the adventures of their Overlord since first he arrived in Cornwall. As the land was at peace and prosperity reigned, they were content to leave matters as they were.

My bride was very charming. Also she had a regal bearing and a haughty toss of the head which much astonished me, as I well knew her ancestry and former environment. As Ruth, daughter of humble parents, she had been rescued from the dragon and perhaps a worse fate at the hands of her aged lover; as Percy, the page, she had served me humbly and well, satisfied with an occasional word of kindness and a smile. Now this same girl did queen it over my castle and, in fact, over all Cornwall, as though she were to the manor born.

Having taken but scant part in her becoming my wife (the fact being that I had not even been consulted and had known nothing of what was to happen till she came from the Bride Well), I felt that with her it was a case of sink or swim and that she could make her way with good folk of Cornwall as best she might with meager help from me. To my surprise she did this very thing in an excellent manner. I was completely ignored and often left alone in the library while Queen Leonora entertained our guests, listening avidly to their flatteries. All day the castle buzzed with, "Oh, Queen Leonora, what dainty hands you have, encorrellled with the most beautiful rings!" and "What a lovely complexion!" and, "How fortunate to possess that string of exquisite pearls!" or, "How remarkable that ivory pendant of Cupid and how bravely he carries his bow and arrow!"

For a while I contented myself bringing my history to date; but finally I could no longer endure the strain, so summoned the lady to the library. She gave me a deep curtsy and then lost herself in one of the leather chars, covered, as it happened, with the skin of a black bear, against which ebony her white gown and whiter skin shone like the sun 'gainst a darkening sky.

"I want to talk with you, Madam," I began with scant ceremony. "In some way you became my wife and therefore Queen of Cornwall. As such you have, in a small passage of time, gained a most pleasing popularity. But it grieves and perplexes me to see that you and many of my formerly loyal subjects have almost forgotten my existence. Besides, how came you by that string of wonderful pearls, each worth a king's ransom and larger by far than the pair Cleopatra dissolved for the pleasure of her

Roman visitors? Of course I know that you say they were my betrothal present, but well enough we know that I never gave them to you."

"The priest who married us gave them to me ere he left," she answered. "I thought you knew him. He told me he was an old friend of yours and had spent a pleasant evening with you in legerdemain. All the ladies admire them greatly. I do not deem it kind of you to scold me, because one of the reasons I married you was to make your position stronger, for all the Cornwall nobles said you must have a wife."

"You did not understand them correctly. A wife was but an incident."

"I am sure I do not comprehend your meaning."

"Naturally not. How could you? I admit that you have a certain beauty and, now that you are married, fill out your gown with admirable curves, but what can you know about affairs of state?"

"I know more than you can imagine. Do you realize that the south of Cornwall is muttering? I heard of it, and, at this time, three of the leaders are in the castle. Give them presents, increase their rank and keep them loyal, or cut off their heads and thus bring an end to their discontent. They await your pleasure, but 'twas your queen who beguiled them here to feel the weight of your hand, either in love or in passion."

This annoyed me, and I could not help but show it.

"You worry me, Leonora!" I cried, "and I wish you would attend to your own affairs and leave the rule of the land to me. You know nothing of politics, and your place is in the women's gallery directing your maidens to spin, weave and make tapestries. Some weeks ago I asked you to have them busy themselves with an embroidery of the Overlord Cecil slaying the three-headed dragon of Wales. I wish it to replace that tapestry of Knight Hercules and his fifty-one damsels. I told the seneschal to remove it, but he had the impudence to tell me that you asked that it remain in your bedchamber. Besides, and this you should consider carefully, your becoming queen was just an accident and if you were not queen some other woman would be; and it was

not a queen my nobles wanted me to have, but a son. So far, you have failed to realize this. I will get me a child, and, it may be, once I have perfected the formula, I will get more. Now that I think of it, there is no time to spare. Have my harness ready and fill my leather purse with gold pieces, for tomorrow I am on my way to Amorica and from there to Cockaigne and all the weird and unattainable places of the earth, including the forbidding desert of Gobi. I will travel far and never rest till I work my magic and have me a son. While I am gone, behave yourself; see that the grapes are gathered in the fall and wine made. Have the larger hogs killed—”

I minded to say more but was given pause by Leonora, who faced me white-heated and unquestionably angry. Her words came so fast that I could gather only a general idea of what she was trying to say. The gist of it was that she did not care how soon I left and the longer I stayed away the better pleased she would be, that she would be delighted if I never came back, for she could rule Cornwall without me and if she had known the kind of a husband I would prove to be she would have rotted in the Bride Well. Then came laughter and tears and, before I was aware, a smart slap on my face, a swishing of silk and I was alone in the library.

Of course, after that, I was bound to go. The sooner I left on my magical search for a son and heir, the sooner I would return and have the boy recognized as the future Overlord of Cornwall. I was confident that the boy and I would have a grand time in the castle and it would be no waiting at all till I would be teaching him to read and to write his letters on parchment.

The next day, all being prepared for my departure, I sent for the seneschal and the captain of my men-at-arms. During my absence they were to hold the border for me and see that the castle and its inmates were protected against any evil ones who came against it. If I was asked for, the seneschal should simply say that I had gone on a very private business to Cockaigne and mayhaps even to Gobi, finally returning to reward the good and punish the evil-doers.

“And while I am gone, Aethelstan,” I said, “you are to be in

full command. In other words you will serve as the vicar of the Overlord. You will even see to it that the Queen only assumes the responsibility of a mere woman. She must have no authority."

"I'll do my best," the old man replied, but it was evident that he was not certain of his ability to carry out my orders.

Very late that afternoon I rode down the road, and the manner of my leaving the castle was in splendid contrast to my incoming when my horse had died and I had been fortunate enough to win the friendship of the mystical man who had won the Battle of the Toads. Though I was fully armed, I now was able to place more confidence in my reputation, which was spread throughout the land, according to my correspondents, as far as the kingdom ruled over by Prester John. Brave man indeed it would be who willingly and knowingly assailed the Overlord who had, single-handed, freed Cornwall from every cursed being which had beforetime so grievously infested her borders.

So I wended my way and that night slept on a thick bed of moss under the shelter of a giant oak. I slept easily and in comfort, free for the first time in many days of the ceaseless chitter-chatter nonsense which so characterized my wife's conversation. I thought it a brave and worthwhile adventure, to go forth into the wide world and, by means of magic, form a son from the shapeless things of the darksome voids. I would be beset on every hand by salamanders, succubi, cocatrices and giant centipedes, and yet, by my power, their strength would be of no avail and finally I would win me back to Cornwall with a lovely boy on the pommel of my saddle. In my drowsiness I smiled, fancying the chit's amazement when I sent her back to Wales.

Early the next day I came to the Irish Sea. Here was a wonder that I could never fathom, how the water came in endless waves and yet there was always water as before and no ceasing of the waves. Seated on stallion I looked over the mighty sea and mused.

"Only this water keeps me from being the greatest monarch of all time; for, if there were no water, Cornwall would include Ireland and go westward from that island till it took India into its domain and even come to the magical land of Gobi. Surely such a

kingdom would give me ample opportunity to prove my greatness."

"Indeed it would," said a soft voice behind me. Turning quickly I saw the priest who had married us, and who had played such an important role when I became Overlord.

"Well, well!" I exclaimed.

"And a third well, Cousin Cecil, and what brings you, a newly married man, to be looking so longingly over the Irish Sea, when you should be at home, in soft and pleasurable dalliance with your lovely bride?"

"We had an argument," I replied. "She failed utterly to comprehend my ambitions in life, and added word on word till she came all in a frenzy. So I left her, for wife or no wife, I know my duty to Cornwall and none may say that Cecil, the Overlord, failed to measure up to any of his responsibilities."

"And what is this great duty?"

"I must have a child. The barons of my country wish the formation of a dynasty. They desire an heir to sit in my stead when I am no longer here but gone West. Now I know a little of magic and know where I can learn more, so I am faring to Cockaigne and may even go as far as Gobi so I can learn the magic of making a son, and then I will return to my native land so that all my subjects may bow to the Prince of Cornwall."

"Fine! Wonderful! A most laudable ambition. Allow me to help you. Ride the rest of today along the coast eastward. Towards evening, just as the mewing sea gulls proudly flaunt their preened feathers in the golden glitter of the setting sun, you will come to a very old castle inhabited by an equally aged man. Tell him who you are and that I sent you and he will be pleased to entertain you. In his most remarkable library you will find every book that has ever been written concerning the magic of child-making. If you wish to have a son you will find in these books a dozen, dozen methods."

"Then I will not have to go to Gobi?" I questioned happily.

"You did not even have to come here," he answered with a gay laugh, and, running down to the surf, dove mightily into the waves and swam toward Ireland. I looked at his footprints in the

sand and saw they were like those of a goat. Here was a magical sign that this man, who certainly had shown his friendship for me on several occasions, was more than human.

That evening, soon before twilight, I arrived at the old castle and was welcomed into the library of the aged owner. Everything had turned out as foretold by the priest. The old man was friendly, though he had a peculiar smile when I informed him concerning the reason for my visit.

"Few come here on such a quest," he commented, "though I admit that my collection of manuscript books is most unusual. You could spend the rest of your life here reading the marvelous lore concerning the thousands of methods of creating children."

"I am astonished that there are so many!"

"It is easy to understand. For centuries learned men have sought to understand the mysterious forces of the spirit-world; none of them thought their lifework complete until they devised a new, startling and perfect method of creating babies in their caves, underground castle rooms where, far away from the disquiet of society, they lived and died.

"I suppose you have read most of them?" I questioned as I looked around the room and saw the hundreds of books.

"Very few of them. In my youth it was not necessary and in old age my eyesight failed."

Satisfied that my stallion was well provided for, I ate a hearty supper and then slept well. The next morning I started to read concerning various methods whereby a man could make him a son. The idea of creating an homunculus pleased me, for it had seemed to me that a child, created by man only, without the contaminating influence of the female sex, must, of necessity, excel in wisdom. No doubt the Good Lord, in his all wisdom, must have had some reason for creating Mother Eve, the first woman, but, in my humble opinion, the world would have been a finer place wherein to live and man much happier had he omitted this final work. As I read on concerning the homunculi I found they were of small size but very intelligent, and I decided not to make one. He might know more than I and that would never do. Also I was certain that a little man, irrespective of his wisdom,

would never be able to do battle as the Overlord of Cornwall if the Welsh invaded my lands.

After some weeks of continued reading it seemed best to make use of interlocking triangles, traced with the tusk of an elephant, and the earth inside the triangles well moistened with the blood of bats. Then the mystic phrase must need be whispered:

"Luro Vopo Vir Voarchadumia."

Following the use of this horrific slogan it would be necessary to wait till the various processes of fixation, deflagration, putrifaction and rubification began, matured and arrived at a satisfactory ending. Then, when the star Cantharis came to the meridian, the child would be found in the center of the two triangles, whose points interlocked.

What could be simpler?

All I needed was to obtain the tusk of an elephant and the blood of bats. I asked the ancient if he could help me. He told me that as far as he knew, there had been no elephants in the land for many centuries. He advised me to ride down to the white cliffs of Dover, explaining that there were large horses carved in the stone there and I might find an elephant skeleton. I took his advice but after a two week search found nothing but the bones of a very large bull. So I moodily rode back to the castle by the sea, where the old man met me joyfully, saying that while digging for fishworms in his garden he had found the remains of a very large elephant, had cut a tusk off the skull and had cleaned and sharpened the point. He had also caught some bats and bled them into a red crystal vase.

I thanked him but suggested that the magic might fail unless a young man found the tusk and personally bled the bats. "Methinks," I said, "that since they are used to procreate a child, a young man should secure them, one in the prime of manhood, like myself."

"Since you are creating this child without the aid of a woman, I do not think that age has aught to do with it. All of the manuscripts in my library which tell of such unisexual creations were written by ancient men in their dotage." I thought this was a curious answer but after due consideration, decided he was

right. In addition I also was feeling rather old by this time, not a doddering senile, but certainly far older than when I left my castle some weeks before.

Thereon I searched the castle till I found a small, dry dungeon, poorly lighted by a slotted window and surfaced with a dirt floor. This I smoothed off and, with the point of the tusk, drew the double triangle. Then I scattered the bat's blood within the interlockings and whispered the horrible but evidently necessary words. After that there was nothing to do but wait for Cantharis to be in the proper position in the sky, which the old man had said would be in the space of ten months of twenty-eight days each. What a long time to wait! Of course the books in the library helped me pass the time and, on pleasant days, I went riding to exercise the stallion. I thoroughly enjoyed the library and read parts of every manuscript in it, though more and more I marveled at so many men in the world having children without possessing such methods of creation and not even knowing how to read. One day I praised the old man for his wisdom and his ability to select such wisdom, but he claimed no credit, simply replying that the manuscripts had been collected by a former owner of the castle who had club feet.

But I was worried. I had thrown the dice and risked all on a single toss. As the days passed I lost confidence and cursed myself for not having used a dozen magical methods of procreation at one and the same time. Then surely one would have come to a satisfactory ending. On the other hand, what would I have done if they had all worked favorably and I had a dozen sons, all created at the same time? Which one would have been the future Overlord of Cornwall? As it was now, it was win or lose, defeat or success. No wonder I had sorry dreams in which Leonora mocked me, tempting me with pursed mouth filled with kisses.

Finally the ten months of twenty-eight days each came to an end. All I would have to do was to open the door and pick the little boy from out the interlocked triangles. I tried to remember that I was a brave follower of all great magicians, but my hand shook slightly as I opened the dungeon door and illumined the

dark room with a lighted pine torch. No child on the floor! Only a hissing snake that flicked its forked tongue toward me and sought safety in a rock crack.

Failure! Utter and complete failure! Months on anticipation, tiresome waiting and hard study, with naught but a snake to pay me for my pains! Heartsick, I toiled up the stone steps and staggered to my favorite chair in the library. Waiting for me was the priest, his feet handsomely shod in green leather pantofles.

"Hail, pater familias!" he cried, and his voice boomed musically through the great room.

"You speak wrongly," I replied in sorrow. "All these months I have toiled with the magic that seemed most likely to succeed; instead of a sturdy man-child I made only a little, slithering snake that any farmer boy could go Woodward and soon gather at the end of forked stick. Bah! Between you and your books, a year of my young life has been taken from me and I am still childless."

"My dear Cecil," the priest said gravely, as he laid a kind hand on my knee. "I would not harm you in any way. You are thick-headed, and the only way you can learn is by your own experience. Months ago you deliberately left your castle and so sweet bride, being bound and determined to create a child by legerdemain. Had I not advised otherwise, you might have gone to Gobi. Perhaps you were wise in not biding with your wife, for you had to stay somewhere. Women are always hard to live with, but at times they are more difficult to please than usual. You have had your little fling and tried your hand at a most terrible magic. Now that you know your limitations you had better go home and attend to your duties in Cornwall. For I have news of great import for you. Cornwall, deeming you dead, hath selected a new Overlord."

"Surely that cannot be!" I cried, leaping from my chair.

"'Cannot' is a large word to use. Were I you, I would hasten back and see the truth for myself. You were witless to remain away so long."

"Witless I may be!" I howled in rage. "But I can still use my two-handed sword, my battle mace and my ten-foot lance. My

stallion neigheth for the fire and sweat of battle. I will go and fight this impostor in single combat. What part had the Queen in this? Was she loyal to me?"

"I understand she furnished your successor."

"I expected nothing else. Welsh women have that reputation. At least she might have waited longer for my return. Did you give her those pearls she flaunted in my face?"

My angry words must have annoyed him. At least he faded away like so much mist before the sun. I started as I noted the manner of his leaving. It was all too much for me. Tossing several tumblers of ale down my parched throat I threw me on a couch and, shivering, forced myself to sleep.

Three days later I was near enough to my cattle to be cautious. I identified myself to a friendly peasant whom I had befriended in the past. Leaving my horse and armor with him I borrowed some of his old clothes and told him I would send for the stallion and war gear in a few days. It was fortunate I was in disguise, or I would have been easily recognized by the nobility who seemed to be gathering from all parts of Cornwall. On foot as I was, I had to keep on watch for these upstarts on horse and in chariot who were giving scant attention to the common folk. I recognized Queen Broda in her golden chariot, her Irish stallions driven by her husband while she nursed a golden-haired boy. Courtiers trumpeted the coming of the King of Wales bringing presents to the new Overlord. Oh, I could have sliced him with pleasure, and the ink hardly dry on the treaty he had made with me! But I followed the crowd. They acted as though they had come a-Maying, with songs and flowers and chit-chatting talk. It was "Oh, the lovely Queen!" and "Oh, how fortunate we are to have a new Overlord!"

At last we all came to the castle. I watched for a chance and wended me to the library, the windows of which provided a fine view of the courtyard thronged with grand folk from all over our little world. To them came my wife, the deceitful and false Leonora, the woman that I, in love, had once call by the sweet name of Ruth. The crowd huzzahed her, and I could see that she

still held their fancy with her baneful beauty. She seemed sad but yet very determined.

"Men of Cornwall!" she cried regally, and I had to acknowledge to myself that she looked every inch a queen. "Men of Cornwall and friends from Ireland and Wales, greetings! Bravely and well have you been loyal to me during the sad months while my Lord Cecil has been absent from Cornwall. He adventured to Gobi, at the request of the unfortunates of that country, in quest of the most horrible *Centripedius*, a creature so large that our former dragons of Cornwall were but little garden lizards in comparison. Patiently you have waited with me for his return. Now the time has come when we cannot but feel that my Lord hath died, a stranger in a strange land, overcome by a magic he could not conquer. And so I give you my son, baptized Eric the Golden, but now called Cecil Secundus. He, lawful descendant of my dear, dead husband, has every right to become your new Overlord."

At that she took a sturdy youngster from a nurse and held him high above her head. Then cried the multitude their approval, and all seemed happy and gay. Barons came and placed a crown on Leonora's head and made her regent till the boy came of age.

"This will take some explaining," I mused to myself. "Somehow or other I seem to be out of the picture."

Leonora found me in my favorite chair, the one covered with bearskin. "Why, Cecil!" she cried, as she threw herself into my arms. "Where have you been all the time? Why did you stay so long?"

I kissed her many times. Somehow I felt that she expected me to, and I did not want to disappoint her.

"I have been to places you wot not of," I replied gravely, "and you need not think I have been idle. Today I noticed that you held in your arms a sturdy boy. Does that look as though I was idling while a away from you? Some day, when the mood strikes me, I will tell you how I worked a magical sending in Gobi, the very telling of which will make the hairs on your head stand out like quills upon the bristling porcupine. Though the danger was great I gladly risked it, for I promised Cornwall a Prince; and

Cecil, Overlord of Cornwall, has never failed to keep a promise. Think you that you, a weak, ignorant woman, could have done all this without the aid of my magical workings in Gobi? I had to stay away till I knew success had crowned my efforts, but I would have arrived sooner had I not paused in Bohemia to rescue a beautiful lady from a terrible death. So do not puff up with too great pride. It was my skill as a magician in the Gobi Desert that gave you the opportunity to present that boy to all of our friends. It was masculine magic, and fearful and wonderful were the things I did and the words I said while far away from you. Now tell me, did you make wine last year?"

"I did, my Lord," she replied meekly. There was no doubt that she was deeply impressed by my narrative.

"Then bring me a brimming horn of it. I want to drink to the long health and happiness of my son, Eric the Golden. Time enough to call him Cecil Secundus when I am dead and he rules in my place."

"I will gladly bring you a brimming horn of wine, Cecil darling, but do not forget, in your more sober moments, that there is such a thing as *feminine magic*." With that she ran out of the room, her silvery laughter following her.

Now what did she mean by that?



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Inquisitions

THE MOON OF SKULLS, by Robert E. Howard; Time-Lost Series, Centaur Press; softcover; 60 cents.

This book contains three of Robert E. Howard's Solomon Kane stories, which formerly were available in a hardcover edition (which I never saw), under the title: *Red Shadows*; prior to this, the stories could be found only in *WEIRD TALES* between 1928 and 1932, or in unpublished manuscripts left by the author when he died in 1936. The softcover edition seems to be very well made, with an attractive cover illustration by Jeff Jones from the hardcover edition, and clear print on good paper. The contents include *Skulls in the Stars* and *The Footfalls Within*, in addition to the title novel, which originally ran in the June and July 1930 issues of *WEIRD TALES*, with a cover and interior illustrations by Hugh Rankin. *Skulls in the Stars* was in the January 1929 issue of *WEIRD TALES*, also illustrated by Rankin; it was reprinted in the June 1965 (No. 9) issue of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*. *The Footfalls Within* led off the September 1931 issue of *WEIRD TALES*, with a wildly inaccurate double-spread illustration by C. C. Senf, which shows Solomon Kane in the costume of a 19th century Englishman in the tropics—Kane is a 17th century Puritan.

Solomon Kane was very popular with readers of *WEIRD TALES* and a sizeable minority either considered him superior to Conan, or actively yearned (through writing letters to the editor) for more

S.K. stories to spell the Cimmerian. However, no further Kane stories appeared in the magazine after Conan made his debut in the December 1932 issue with *The Phoenix on the Sword*, and WT published only seven in all. Five unpublished ones were collected and run with the seven in the hardcover volume, along with three poems dealing with the character; two more volumes of selections from this book are planned by Centaur.

Remembering them quite well from my last reading of some years back, and with pleasure, I have not bothered to re-read these tales in the edition before me. If you enjoy Robert E. Howard's stories, these are among the better ones. Recommended. RAWL

* * *

THE LITTLE MONSTERS (Children of Wonder and Dread), Edited by Roger Elwood and Vic Ghidalia; MB (Mafadden-Bartell) paperback; 75 cents.

Contents: *The Metronome*, August Derleth; .

Contents: *The Metronome*, August Derleth; *Let's Play Poison*, Ray Bradbury; *The Playfellow*, Cynthia Asquith; *Mimsey Were The Borogroves*, Henry Kuttner; *The Antimicasser*, Greyla Spina; *Old Clothes*, Algernon Blackwood; *How Fear Departed from the Long Gallery*, E. F. Benson; *They Rudyard Kipling*.

This is an uncommonly good collection in that no story in it struck me as being less than very good, and

some were unfamiliar to me. I cannot tell how much of this is the work of Vic Ghidalia (as differentiated from Roger Elwood), but I can tell that the team has made a hit with their very first book; so it is pleasant to hear they have further anthologies in the planning stage—and perhaps in the works by the time you read this.

All depends upon how much overlap there is in the contents of this volume with other anthologies, collections, and old magazines which you already may own; if three or even two of the stories are not in your collection, it might be worth your while to obtain this well-printed edition anyway—and if more than three, well by all means!

I told Vic that I'd never read this particular Blackwood tale before, but on thinking it over, I have a feeling that, after all, I did back in 1937. However, the Asquith, Benson, and Kipling stories were new to me. I remembered the Derleth tale with pleasure, but had forgotten how effective the Bradbury

and La Spina were; and a particular pleasure was in finding that the famous Kuttner story seems just as fresh and powerful on yet another re-reading as it did last time.

I make one complaint in hopes that this may not be a feature flaw in a long series: the lack of running heads bearing the story title on the right hand pages makes it irritating to try to locate any particular story—and there is no *need* for the omission. It does *not* make the book look better; in fact, centering page numbers at the bottom of the page, without running heads at the top (other than on title pages) is an esthetic blot as well as an annoyance. But don't let this alone deter you. (Of course, if other reasons dispose you to pass it up, and you agree with me about the imbecility of the absence of identifying running heads in an anthology or collection, you *could* write to the publishers and say *that* was why you would not invest your hard-earned money in their book. For such small fibs in a worthy cause, I'll gladly absolve you.) RAWL



THE WHISTLING CORPSE

by G. G. Pendarves

(author of *The Dark Star*)

G. G. PENDARVES was first seen in the August 1926 issue of *WEIRD TALES*, with a short story entitled *The Devil's Graveyard*. This, and three further stories in 1927, was well received; but it was with *The Eighth Green Man*, in the March 1928 issue that the newcomer really made a lasting impression on the readers. By popular demand, Farnsworth Wright reprinted the story in the January 1937 issue, and his successor reprinted it again in the May 1952 issue.

It was not until Editor Wright reported the death of G. G. Pendarves, in 1939, that we learned that the name was a pseudonym for Gladys Gordon Trenery, who lived in England. At this time, she had had 18 stories published in the magazine, and the final one to appear, *The Withered Heart*, was presented posthumously. She also had seven appearances in the companion magazine to *WEIRD TALES: ORIENTAL STORIES*, which later became *THE MAGIC CARPET*, and in both guises published fascinating tales of the East, many of them by well-known WT contributors.

Three other Pendarves stories merited revival in *WEIRD TALES*, some years after their original publication: *The Grave at Goonhilly* (October 1930, March 1954); *The Sin-Eater* (December 1938, July 1954); and *Thing of Darkness* (August 1937, November 1953). You, the readers, applauded *The Dark Star* (originally in WT, March 1937), when we revived it in our issue No. 21, May 1968. The present tale is one which, I'm sure, WT would have reprinted had the magazine survived longer.

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"WHY, STEEVENS, WHATEVER IS THE MATTER? You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"And if I haven't, it's by the mercy of Providence," replied the chief steward, "though what we *may* see before this trip is over is something I don't want to think about."

Mrs. Maddox stared. She'd been stewardess on board the *S. S. Dragon* for the past five years, worked under Steevens all that time, and knew him for the most even-tempered, easy-going creature that ever sailed in a ship. She felt a nasty sensation of goose-flesh and clutched her bundle of clean white towels a trifle more tightly in her arms.

"Good gracious me! Well, what is it? You're getting me all in a dither!"

"They've — they've opened Number 14!"

She frowned, blinked, and several towels slid unnoticed to the floor. "Not *the* 14? Not 14 on deck A? No!"

Her voice rose discordantly, and Steevens was recalled to his duty by its sudden stridency. "S-s-s-sh! D'you want the passengers to hear? They're going down to dinner. Second bugle's sounded."

They were standing in one of the linen rooms, a narrow slip near a main companionway. Mrs. Maddox turned a white, stricken face. "Tell me, quick!"

"Captain's orders! This is his first command. He's young, thinks he knows everything. Isn't going to keep a first-class stateroom locked up on *his* ship. I heard the end of a row him and the chief was having. Mr. Owen up and told him as the owners knew all about it. And the Old Man said he was going to show the owners there wasn't no need to lose money every trip."

"Steevens!" Mrs. Maddox looked suddenly far older than her forty-eight years. "If I hear that whistling again I'll—I'll lose my reason and that's a fact."

He had no comfort to offer. The man's cheerful, weathered face wore the same look of dread as her own. "You can't tell the cap'n anything. But wait till he hears it too!"

"And when he does"—she turned on him with a fury of demoralizing fear—"what good's that going to do us all? It'll be

too late then. The door's opened now and it's out again . . . it's out!"

First-Class passengers were making their way to the dining-saloon for the first meal on board. The *S.S. Dragon* had left Liverpool landing-stage only two hours ago; so people straggled in without ceremony, tired from the bustle of embarkation, agitated about the preliminaries of settling down on board; the majority either wound up to a pitch that sought relief in floods of talk or preserved stony silence that would have done credit to tombstone effigies.

Mark Herron, a boy of ten, traveling in the captain's care, stood in hesitation at the entrance to the dining-saloon. One of the passengers, a Mr. Amyas, put a friendly hand on his shoulder. "Coming in?"

Without hesitation now, Mark smiled up at the brown, wrinkled face with its piercingly black eyes.

"Waiting for someone, eh?"

"No." The boy's voice was as attractive as his slate-gray eyes that concentrated so eagerly on anything or anyone that attracted his attention. His rough shock of brown hair and equally rough brown tweeds made him look somewhat like a very intelligent, well-bred dog.

"I'm traveling alone," he confided. "I've been ill and Captain Ross knows Dad and told him I'd be better for a sea-trip. I'm going to Java and back on this ship."

The gipsy-black eyes twinkled. "That's my program too! We'll keep each other company—eh? My name's Amyas. And you're—?"

"Mark Herron, sir."

"All right, then. Now, let's plunge into the jungle and see what we can catch for a meal."

The little man made for a table over on the port-side, one of the smaller tables where some member of the staff had already begun his meal. As Mark and his new friend approached, the man looked up. Immediately he sprang to his feet, welcoming hand outstretched.

"How are you, Amyas? I'm delighted! Who's this you've got in tow? A stowaway?"

Mark was introduced to the ship's doctor. Mr. Amyas sat down. The boy stood, looking with bewildered frown at the third and only vacant place.

Doctor Fielding laughed. "What's the matter? Something wrong with that chair?"

The boy's face grew red. He looked from the doctor to Mr. Amyas with embarrassed reproach. "Oh—but—" He glanced apologetically at the third place, then moved hastily to a table near by and sat down there.

The two men stared at Mark. Covered with confusion, he was pretending to study a large menu-card.

"Must think we want to be by ourselves."

Mr. Amyas got up and crossed over to the boy's table. "Come and join us. What d'you mean by refusing to sit down with a friend of mine—eh?"

Mark glanced back at the other table. His face cleared. He went back with alacrity and slipped into the empty place.

"I think he was angry." He looked from one to the other of his companions' blank faces. "He's gone out without any dinner at all."

Then, as they continued to regard him with expressionless eyes, he laughed. "Is it a joke, or something? That man didn't think it funny, anyhow, when you wanted me to sit down on top of him."

"What was he like?" The doctor's voice held a sudden arrested note of breathless interest.

"Didn't you notice him? Such a queer man, too! A yellow sort of face, very lined and cross, and he'd black hair—like the Italian organ-grinder who comes round with his monkey at home."

"Did you—did you happen to notice if he wore a ring?" The doctor seemed quite amazingly interested.

"Yes. A very big one, rather dull and funny-looking! I thought he must be a foreign prince. Like the ones in the papers, you

know. Going off somewhere because they'd taken his throne away. That's what he looked like."

Doctor Fielding put his arms on the table, leaned forward, regarded the boy with a strange look of awe. "Look here! You're the kid the captain's looking after—the great Arthur Herron's son?"

Mark nodded, his face glowing at the admission.

"H-m-m! Captain Ross said you were a bit of a wizard yourself with your pencil. You can draw?"

Mark nodded again with calm confidence.

"Could you, by any chance, draw from memory the man you saw sitting here?"

The boy smiled and pushed aside his soup-plate. He turned the menu-card face down, dug a pencil out of a pocket and set to work. Both men watched intently, Mr. Amyas interested in the peculiar mixture of child and artist, the doctor wholly absorbed in a portrait growing under the small, amazingly sure hand. The table steward removed three plates of cold soup and put three portions of fish down with bored resignation. He hovered with a dish of potatoes, caught a glare from the doctor and went to bestow his vegetables elsewhere.

Mark handed his sketch to Doctor Fielding, who regarded it long and frowningly. Finally he got to his feet. His face was grave. "Sorry! You'll have to excuse me. I've—remembered something urgent."

He went out of the saloon with an air of absent-minded haste and took Mark's sketch with him.

"Oh! Was it a prince, d'you think? Is he going to look for him?"

Mr. Amyas discussed the possibility, then led the conversation to other things. The two hit it off famously and went together, afterward, in uproarious spirits to the billiard room.

lean, clever face and tired eyes showed a deeper weariness as he met that look. Captain Ross was one who admitted no breath from the chill void of eternity to penetrate his materialism. It was a solid wall about his thoughts.

The doctor's own mind, ever exploring, seeking, experimenting, found no smallest chink whereby to enter, yet he must attempt it. If he failed, if Captain Ross remained unconvinced, then the *S. S. Dragon* would become a floating hell.

"If the boy saw this man," Captain Ross tapped the menu-card with impatient gesture, "then the man must have been sitting there."

"I did not see him, sir. Mr. Amyas did not see him. The steward did not see him."

"But the boy did! He's not a liar—I happen to know that. If he told you he saw the man, he *did* see him."

"And I repeat — this man," Doctor Fielding indicated the drawing, "died on this ship a year ago and his body was committed to the deep. I saw it done."

"All right, then. In that case there is a passenger on board who bears an extraordinary resemblance to him. That doesn't pass the bounds of possibility. Your idea of a *revenant* does."

A knock at the door interrupted them. The first mate, Mr. Owen, entered. Steevens and Mrs. Maddox followed.

"Ah!" the commander's frosty blue eyes regarded them quizzically. "You three, I understand, were on this ship a year ago when Number 14 on deck A was sealed up?"

"Yes, sir" replied the first mate.

The other two made muffled sounds of assent and endeavored to exchange glances while presenting blank, respectful faces to Captain Ross.

"D'you recognize this, Mr. Owen?"

The chief bent over the table to examine Mark's sketch, then straightened himself with a jerk. His ruddy face was suddenly a sickly brown. He averted his eyes from the sketch as from something that shocked him profoundly. His voice came with a queer uncontrolled jerk. "Yes, sir! It's—it's *him!*"

"I must ask you to be more explicit. Him?"

"Vernon—Eldred Vernon! Where . . . how—?"

He stopped, and thrust shaking hands deep into his pockets. Captain Ross turned his scornful, impatient glance toward the steward and stewardess. "Come on! Come on! Let's get this farce over!"

Timidly the pair advanced and peered reluctantly at the card thrust before their eyes.

"Well? Speak, can't you! Is this your old friend, Vernon?"

"God save us—yes!" muttered Steevens. He fell back from the pictured face in horror.

Mrs. Maddox gave a terrified squawk and clutched him by the arm. "A-r-r-r! A-r-r-r! It's him again! Take it away! I won't look at it! A-r-r-r—"

"Be quiet," barked the captain. "Take her over to that chair, Steevens. You two have got to stop here while this affair is settled once and for all."

He looked from one tense face to another and his eyes sparkled with temper. "You all agree, it seems, that this boy's drawing resembles—who's the man?"

"Eldred Vernon, sir—the late Eldred Vernon," replied the doctor.

"Eldred Vernon, yes. The man who was murdered on this ship in May of 1935."

"The man who murdered Mr. Lackland, sir," softly corrected the first mate.

"Murderer, or murdered, it's all one now. The point is, he's dead."

A deep, unassenting silence answered the statement. Four pairs of eyes expressed complete disbelief in it.

"A pretty lot of fools I seem to have on board! What *is* this mystery? Doctor Fielding, will you have the goodness to make a clear, sensible statement of the facts? The facts, I said, mind you. I don't want a fairy-tale packed with superstition and ghosts."

"Did you read the log for May of 1935?" asked the doctor. "And did the owners explain their reasons for leaving Number 14 sealed up?"

"Yes, to both questions. But don't forget that my predecessor,

Captain Brakell, was a very sick man when he entered up that log. The owners had the facts from him—a sick man's delusions! I attach no value to them. I said as much in the office at Liverpool, gave my opinions. They understood that I proposed to run my own ship in my own way. I will allow no tomfool nonsense to interfere with it."

The doctor's face showed a stain of painful color. "You are very much mistaken, sir, in thinking that Captain Brakell was ill when he entered up the log. He was a very sound man, sound and sane and healthy. His mind then, and to the end of his days, was particularly clear. He was a man of enviable courage and strength and determination. Otherwise he could never have done what he did."

There was a stir and murmur of assent in the small, brightly lit room.

"Captain Brakell collapsed only on reaching port. He brought his ship home first. He brought her home with that devil, Eldred Vernon, imprisoned in Number 14."

"You mean Vernon didn't die during the voyage, after all? You have already told me you saw his body committed to the deep."

"I repeat that I did. But Eldred Vernon's devil lived on—an audible and visible thing."

"And I repeat that I don't believe a syllable."

Again color painted the doctor's sallow face an angry red. "Words mean nothing," he answered curtly. "Words mean nothing. Captain gave his life to make his ship safe. He was heroic, I tell you. Faced terrific odds, and won by sheer strength and goodness. He cornered that crafty devil, Vernon. He couldn't destroy him—that was beyond even *his* wisdom, but he managed to imprison him, to make his ship safe. And you—"

He broke off, remembering he and the captain were not alone. There was an awkward pause. Captain Ross sat with broad, well-kept hands folded on the table before him. Aggressive disbelief depressed the corners of his long, firm mouth. His upper lids drooped quizzically over cold inquiring eyes. Doctor Fielding

sighed, paused as if to marshal inner reserves of strength, then began again on a new flat note of narrative devoid of emotion.

"The whole thing started with an affair between Guy Lackland and Eldred Vernon's very young, very lovely wife, Kathleen Vernon. It blazed up tropically swift and hot. Lackland was attractive, very! Nordic type. In love with life, with himself, and above all with Kathleen Vernon. Brilliant, rollicking youngster. Irresponsible as a puppy off the lead. And whistled like a blackbird."

A stifled groan escaped the stewardess.

"It was a characteristic that features largely in my tale, sir, Lackland's whistling. Dancing, swimming, deck-games, strolling round—you could always keep track of him by that trick he had of whistling. But there was one tune he whistled for one person alone—a sort of lover's signal. The tune was *Kathleen Mavourneen*."

Mrs. Maddox engulfed herself in a large, crumpled pocket-handkerchief. Steevens rubbed a bristly chin. The first mate shifted his feet as if the deck had rolled beneath him, and his throat muscles worked convulsively.

"Her name was Kathleen, as I said. She was a dark, fragile, exquisite thing. Lonely and unhappy. Afraid of her husband. Ripe for a lover. And she fell for young Lackland hard. Inevitably. I never witnessed anything more heart-breaking than her passion for him. Like seeing a brilliant-tinted leaf riding the peak of a monstrous tidal-wave. Swept past all barriers. The pair of them—lost to everything but youth and love—the glory of it! Tragic young fools!"

Captain Ross made no audible comment. His set, obstinate face spoke fathomless misunderstanding.

"Eldred Vernon was a good fifty. A lean, secretive, silent man. Intellectual—repellently so. His brain-power was abnormal. His reasoning faculties, will, concentration were terrific. He'd developed them at the expense of every other quality that makes a decent, likable human being. There was dark blood in him, too. His swaying walk, a peculiar way of rolling his eyes, the lines of jaw and skull. The boy shows it in his sketch here."

Captain Ross glared at it and grunted noncommittally.

"The ugliest thing of all was his jealousy. It's a poisonous quality in anyone. In Vernon it was satanic. He never interfered, though. On the contrary, he arranged to throw them together quite deliberately. We didn't begin to fathom his motives, but the whole situation made our blood run cold. There was none of the ordinary scandal. The affair was too serious, everyone felt scared. I spoke to young Lackland; so did others. One or two of the women warned the wife. Both of them laughed. Eldred Vernon laughed too. It sidetracked the pair of them, the way he laughed! She vowed her husband didn't care two straws what she did as long as she left him alone. Incredible! Everyone was afraid of what Vernon would do except the two most concerned."

Doctor Fielding dropped his cigarette, which had burned down unsmoked between his fingers.

"The inevitable crisis came. She gave Vernon a sleeping-draft in his last whisky one night, then went along to Lackland's stateroom, Number 14 on A deck. Waited for a moment. Heard him inside, moving about, whistling—whistling *Kathleen Mavourneen*."

"And how," interrupted Captain Ross, "do you come by this chapter of your melodrama?"

"She told me—later."

"You had the lady's confidence, I see! Perhaps after Lackland went you took his—"

"She was dying."

The doctor's voice and steady eyes did not waver. He went on like an automaton.

"She went into Number 14 to find—her husband! He was laughing, silently, doubled up, tears of mirth on his face. He tied her up and gagged her, laughing all the time. Told her Lackland would be late. He'd forged a note in her writing, sent it to Lackland asking him to wait, to come to Number 14 at midnight, not earlier on any account. Vernon had counted on a lover's obedience to any whim. He was right.

"Lackland came on the stroke of twelve. Vernon was ready for him—with a knife. In the struggle, Lackland got a grip of the

other's throat. Vernon thrust home. In his death-agony, Lackland's hands tightened, fastened like a vise. Vernon was asphyxiated. A steward found them both dead, lying locked together at Mrs. Vernon's feet."

The bleak austerity in Doctor Fielding's eyes checked comment. "That's all of what you would call fact. Mrs. Vernon died—brain-fever in the end."

"And they were all buried at sea? All three of them?" Captain Ross looked not wholly unsympathetic.

"Yes."

"Then I know the whole thing from start to finish at last."

"No. It is not finished yet, sir. Vernon knew the secret of perpetuating himself in the physical world even without his body. That had been lowered over the side and I saw it done. But Vernon himself—his malicious powerful ego—had never left this ship."

The captain's softened expression was instantly combative. "I've listened to your story, to the end—to the very end! Thank you, doctor. I've no time to speculate on ghosts. Once and for all, I don't believe in the supernatural."

He turned to the others. "Before we break up this meeting, have you anything to say, Mr. Owen?"

The first mate was a Welshman, vivacious, sensitive, emotional. "The doctor's not told you half, sir," he burst out. "You don't know what a hell the ship was for days and nights. God, those nights! Up and down the deck—up and down, whistling—if you could call it whistling."

"Whistling what? And what whistled?"

Mr. Owen was past being daunted by the captain's glance. "A high, queer sort of sound, sir. No tune or anything. Went through your head like red-hot wire. What was it? Don't ask me, sir! It doesn't bear thinking of."

"Exactly. That's my complaint against you all. You refuse to think. This absurd legend of Number 14 would never have existed if you'd thought, and investigated. Anything more?"

"I—we—there was the fog, sir! And Steevens here saw—"

"I'll take him in turn. Fog?"

"Yes, sir. Fog or sea-mist. The whistling seemed to come from it."

With a quick, irritable gesture, Captain Ross turned to the steward.

"Well? What's your little contribution?"

"It's true, sir. You'll know for yourself soon. The whistling and all! Something cruel! Drove you wild, sir! Aye, and that Number 14! Locking the door wasn't no use; no, nor bolting it neither. Chips did his mortal best. But every morning it was burst open, and the bunk-covered thick with dirty foam! The smell of it fair knocked you down, sir. Like something that had rotted in the sea."

Mrs. Maddox was obviously beyond giving verbal support to these statements. She sat shivering, white-faced, tears dripping down her large, pale face to the starched bib on her apron.

Captain Ross got to his feet. "Thank you, Doctor Fielding. Thank you, Mr. Owen. Steward! Report any complaints about Number 14 on deck A to me, if you please. The passenger who is to occupy it is Colonel Everett, a personal friend. He is aware of the facts. I've told him of the deaths that occurred. The rest interests him even less than me."

"One moment." The doctor followed him to the door. "I shall tell your friend, Colonel Everett, the exact nature of the risk he is running."

"Do! He will laugh at you. He shares my views of what you call supernatural phenomena."

"You are exposing him to hideous peril. It's murder, sir!"

Captain Ross looked bored and put his hand to the door-latch.

"One more thing." The doctor's manner was that of a lecturer making his points. "Eldred Vernon marks down his victims methodically, and in every case he gives twenty-four hours warning, a signal of his intent to kill. He whistles *Kathleen Mavourneen*. Last May, before Captain Brakell was able to seal up the door you have opened, five passengers heard that tune. Each one died in twenty-four hours."

"Logged as dying of virulent influenza. I gather the owners

suggested your substituting influenza as your diagnosis in place of ghosts?"

"It was heart-failure from shock."

"Quite. Well, Captain Brakell and I had the same end in view. But we went about it differently. He calmed down his passengers by going through a ceremony of sealing up Vernon's supposed influence. I see more wisdom in letting sun and wind and everyday life penetrate Number 14. After this trip it will be a chamber of horror no longer. I'll have no locked-up rooms on my ship. And anyone who goes round encouraging a belief in ghosts will lose his job and needn't apply to me for references."

3

"GOOD MORNING! GOOD MORNING!" A brick-red, large gentleman at the captain's table, engaged in adding a top-dressing of toast and marmalade to previous strata of porridge, fish, and sausages, spared an inquiring glance for a limp young man who slid into a seat next to him. The young man had butter-colored hair and looked as if serious consideration of vitamins had been omitted from his education.

"Why good?" he moaned. "I've been kept awake all night."

The brick-red gentleman was surprised. "Eh? What? I slept like old Rip Van Winkle."

The limp young man unfurled a table-napkin with the air of one who drapes a winding-sheet about him.

"China tea. This brown toast and bloater paste." He lifted an eyelid to a hovering steward. Then, to his neighbor: "Perhaps you're married or live by a fire-station. I mean," he explained, "whistlings and shriekings and stampings just lull you to sleep! You on deck A? No! I'm in Number 18. There's a damned nuisance of a colonel in 14. Kept up an infernal racket last night."

"Pipe down, my lad, pipe down! He's a friend of the captain!"

"Well, he's going to have an 'in loving memory' label on him soon! Never had such a night."

A tall, straight ramrod of a man stalked in, made his way to the table and took the vacant place at the captain's right.

"I say!" bleated the butter-haired one. "What's the great idea of practising your tin whistle all night? You may think Number 14's sound-proof. Is it? All you've got to do is to come outside and listen to yourself!"

Colonel Everett drank down a cup of coffee almost at a gulp, murmured something about the shortage of reliable nurses, and gave an order to the steward. A good many faces were turned toward him. Other accusers gave vent to their rancor.

"If you're the occupant of Number 14, sir, I think it was damned thoughtless—damned thoughtless of you!" And:

"I'm not one of the complaining ones, but the noise you made was unbearable. My husband got up five times and knocked at your door. And you simply took no notice!" And:

"Are *you* the person in Number 14? I was just telling the captain that it's disgraceful. After all, one does expect some decency and quiet in first-class. My two children were awake and crying all night. No wonder! Such an uproar! Why, even steerage couldn't be more rowdy."

"What is all this about the noise in your stateroom?" asked Captain Ross.

"Someone's idea of a joke." Colonel Everett's face and manner were grim.

The captain frowned at him and spoke under his breath. "Were you pickled when you went to bed, Tom?"

"Don't be a fool! You've known me all my life. I never take more than four whiskies a day."

"Then why didn't you hear all the din?"

"Dunno! Unless I'm due for malaria again. I felt deuced queer when I woke. Dizzy. Couldn't get the hang of things. Feel half doped now."

"Hm-m-m-m! Perhaps you are—doped! This fool notion about Number 14 being haunted! Some maniac's trying it out on us. I'll put him in irons, whoever it is. I've given fair warning I'll have no more of their pet spook on my ship."

Colonel Everett thrust his face forward. His eyes glared. His

lips stretched in an ugly grin. His clear emphatic voice changed to a thin dry rustling whisper. "*What are you going to do about it?*"

Captain Ross's fork dropped with a clatter. He met the evil, malevolent stare hardily, but his face grew white to the lips. Quite literally, he was unable to speak. His thick black brows met. Was this Tom Everett? He didn't recognize the man he'd known so long and intimately. Those cold eyes—hating, defying him! This was a stranger! An enemy!

A voice broke the spell—a boy's voice, eager, confident, friendly. "How queer! I thought that was Colonel Everett at first. He seemed to change. It's the man I drew last night. The prince in disguise, you know."

Colonel Everett drew back, looked round him with a frown. His face and eyes were blank now. He seemed rather shaken, like a man who'd been just knocked down and winded.

Captain Ross felt a sudden vast relief. What an ass he was! Good heavens; he'd actually felt afraid, afraid of good old Tom Everett! The poor fellow was looking ill and shaken. Distinctly under the weather. He signaled to Doctor Fielding, who came round to the head of the table and put a hand on the colonel's shoulder. "Come along with me; I'll fix you up. You've had a rotten night, I can see."

Dazed, swaying on his feet, Colonel Everett allowed the doctor to guide him out of the saloon.

In the big, perfectly equipped kitchens the breakfast episode was discussed with terror.

"I tell you he looked as like *him* for a minute as makes no difference." The steward who waited on the captain's table was telling his tale for the eighth time for the benefit of those detained on duty. "One minute he was the colonel and next minute he was *him*! The Old Man noticed it and all! Looked as if he'd been and swallowed a h'asp."

A brand new young steward spoke up. "Who's this *him* when he's at home?"

"Someone you've not met so far, my cocky. And when you do, you won't crow so loud."

Mrs. Maddox, trying to drown her fear in floods of dark brown tea, intervened. "And how's he going to know if no one don't tell him? Nay! I'm not going to take *his* name on my lips. Someone else can do it—that hasn't heard nor seen what I have on this ship."

Mr. Amyas and the doctor talked in a corner of the deserted dining-saloon.

"He went along to the smoking-room. Revived as soon as we got outside, and refused to go back to bed."

"Hm-m-m!" The little man pulled at his short, pointed white beard. "Could you hear what he was saying to the captain at the breakfast table?"

"No. I saw enough, though. What the boy said was right. He *was* Vernon for a moment."

"Undoubtedly, Colonel Everett as Colonel Everett will soon cease to exist."

The doctor shivered, turned a stricken face seaward. Remembrance of last year's horror surged back with every movement of the restless, sunlit water.

"Eldred Vernon's taking possession of the colonel's body as one would a house. He's moving in," continued Mr. Amyas. "It's barely possible that if the real owner knew what was happening to him he might defend his habitation, drive out the intruder, but I doubt it. Evidence proves Vernon to have unique power. History has only produced two others on his scale. There is the Black Monk of Caldey Island, who has guarded his treasure there since the Tenth Century. And there is Lord Saul, a terror and a mystery since the days of Attila, who tried to kill him by fire and by the sword, and failed. Lord Saul lives to this day."

"Vernon was bound and safely imprisoned once. Can't we do it again?"

"You forget. A year ago Vernon was newly divorced from his body. He was taken at his weakest, before he'd learned the laws, the possibilities of life in a new element. In twelve months he's learned them, so effectively that he's almost achieved his great necessity—a human body."

"Surely that will limit him? A disembodied force is more awful than the wickedest of men."

"No. He'll gain the freedom of two worlds. He can operate in or out of his stolen body. And he can use the will and energy of the dispossessed owner for his own ends. It's a tremendous prize. He'll rank high in hell."

"But—how d'you know all this? You speak as if—"

"It's a long, grim, unnerving tale. Made an old man of me when I was in my twenties, experimenting, like the mad young fool I was then, in occult research. Some day, if we survive, I'll tell it."

"Isn't there the barest chance of saving Everett? Can't you make him believe?"

"That's what I don't know. I can only guess. It's one of the things that doesn't go by rule of thumb. Every crisis varies. But there *is* a moment—"

They were interrupted by a scream, sounds of running feet, a second scream. Mr. Amyas turned, ran lightly along to deck A with the doctor at his heels. An excited group of passengers was collecting there. The first mate appeared. Inside the open doorway of a lounge stood Steevens with several other cabin stewards. They appeared to be holding an agitated council of war.

The first mate addressed this twittering little group. "What's all this?"

"Sir! It's Number 14. We saw—"

"Get inside. I'll come along."

He returned to the startled passengers. "Nothing much." His smile was reassuring. "One of the stewardesses! She's had hysterics again. Husband died a few weeks ago and she's gone to pieces over it."

"Very neat," commended Doctor Fielding. "We'll come with you to see what's really happened."

Owen nodded. His eyes and mouth looked strained. Outside the closed door of Number 14 a huddle of white-coated stewards waited.

"It's what it was before, sir," whispered Steevens. "The bunk was covered with it. Foam—dirty gray foam—inches thick! Right over the bunk, pillows and all. And the smell—my Gawd!"

Owen stood rigid, one hand on the door-latch. Mr. Amyas saw him shudder, caught the loathing on his face as he flung open the door and went inside. Doctor Fielding and Mr. Amyas followed quickly. All three looked instantly at the bunk. A pall of dirty gray foam covered it, like the silt of a monster tidal wave; the air was foul with the odor of stale sea-water and things long dead. Doctor Fielding scribbled a few words in his note-book, tore out the leaf and gave it to the first mate. "Take that to the captain—at once!"

Thankfully the man escaped. A steward called after him. "If he wants this bunk made up he'll have to get another man for the job. I'd sooner jump overboard. I'm not going inside 14 again! He can put me in irons—but I won't—I won't—"

The first mate vanished beyond reach of the man's hysterical outburst. No one paid any attention to it. All eyes were fixed on Doctor Fielding and Mr. Amyas standing inside.

"Quick!" cried the doctor. "Out of here!"

Next moment, both were in the passage, and the door fast bolted, but not before they'd seen the blanket of gray foam ripple and heave as if water surged beneath it. And as the door banged to, a sudden shrill whistling began—like the sound of escaping steam. Footsteps approached, a firm, soldierly tread. Colonel Everett's tall straight figure advanced down the long corridor. The whistling ceased abruptly.

"What on earth? Are you playing 'Clumps'? And why outside my door?"

The colonel's eyes, friendly and puzzled, turned from the doctor's haggard face to meet the speculative watchful gaze of Mr. Amyas. He put a hand to his head.

"Better follow your advice after all, Doctor Fielding. I'm beginning to feel—"

Then, with appalling suddenness, he changed. Voice, face, manner took on the feral primitive hate of a jungle beast. He

loomed over Mr. Amyas. "You're one of the clever ones, you think—spying round, adding up, working out your little ideas! That's puzzled you, I'll swear!" He jerked his head toward the closed door; a wicked flare of laughter leaped in his eyes. "Go on worrying—I'm enjoying it! You'll not get me caged up there again, though. *I'm out! . . . and I stay out!*"

Todd, the hysterical young steward, gave an odd, sighing cough and slid to the ground. Steevens dropped beside him, unfastened his collar, held up his head. The rest ran for it, bolted in panic, their feet thudding along the narrow passage like a roll of drums.

Under Mr. Amyas's steady look the red glare died in Colonel Everett's eyes, his convulsed features relaxed. He steadied himself by a polished brass handrail that ran along the wall.

"I thought—I thought someone called me," he said. "I feel a little dizzy!" He looked vaguely from Mr. Amyas to the unconscious Todd, then to Steevens. "What's been happening here? What the deuce is wrong with everyone on this ship?"

"Colonel Everett!" Mr. Amyas was profoundly serious. "Will you put prejudice aside? Will you be persuaded that you are in danger? Will you believe that this room is more poisonous than a rattlesnake's lair?" He gestured to the closed door behind them. "Have you been in since breakfast? No! Well, it's taking a risk, but it may convince you."

He opened the door.

"Well?" the colonel frowned. "What is it?"

But Mr. Amyas found no answer. There was nothing to say. There was nothing to see except the bunk with its tossed bed-clothes—the flowered green curtains fluttering at the open window—the white enameled walls splashed by the sun with golden light. Mr. Amyas closed the door. The three men faced one another in the corridor.

"Is there any explanation for all this?"

The colonel, very large and indignant, stood with a frown. He was answered by a shrill, fierce whistle. It seemed outside the room now. Todd, who had recovered consciousness, glanced up, and fell back in a dead faint once more. Steevens cowered against

the wall with mouth grotesquely open. He pointed at Colonel Everett. "Look! Look! It's him! . . . ah, ha ha ha ha *ha!* . . . it's him!"

The doctor and Mr. Amyas shuddered.

"You'd better look out for yourselves," came a savage whisper. "You'd better not interfere. Nothing can stop me. *I'm out!*"

A twisted mask of a face leered into theirs. "Look out for yourselves!"

On this last, Colonel Everett's hand opened the door of Number 14. He went inside. The door slammed to. The whistling shrilled louder . . . higher . . . higher . . .

4

"FOG, SIR! BEEN DRIFTING round for a couple of hours. I noticed it as soon as my watch began."

Captain Ross glanced down from his bridge toward the poop. There—among coils of tarry rope and a mass of canvas, iron, life-buoys, and other carefully stowed gear—a patch of white, woolly fog wavered and drifted. The captain snatched up a pair of binoculars and looked long and earnestly. "Go down and see," he ordered.

The third mate saluted and went. His face was white as he turned to obey. Captain Ross watched while he made his way to deck B and thence to the poop, saw him go forward, hesitate, peer at the eddying fog. Suddenly he threw up his hands with a startled gesture and turned to run.

"Good God! It's after him!"

Captain Ross gripped the rail under his hands as he spoke, and leaned over to watch with eyes almost starting out of his head. Stumbling, running, turning to look back over his shoulder at the thing that steadily pursued, the mate zigzagged an erratic course. A woman's shriek was heard.

An instant later, pandemonium rose on deck B. Men and women struggled from their deck-chairs. Some, entangled in rugs, tripped and fell. Some were too paralyzed by horror to move at

all. Deck stewards, serving tea trays, let their burdens tilt, and the crash of breaking china added to the uproar.

The third mate ran with open mouth, his hands making queer flapping movements, his eyes wild with terror. The fog rolled up behind—closer—closer. A long white wisp of it seemed to blow out like a tentacle, touched the mate's neck, curled round it. The man yelled, put up clutching fingers. His cry died on a strangling sob.

Captain Ross roared out an order through his megaphone. The mate was down on his knees now. Over him the fog circled and hovered. Several of the crew came running; they were, so far, more in awe of the captain than anything else on board. They picked up the mate and carried him off at a run, vanished down a companionway.

Captain Ross let out a great breath of relief and put down his megaphone with an unsteady hand. The cloud of fog was blowing down deck again. Now it was drifting round the poop. And from it the captain heard a high, keening, intolerable whistle, rising, falling, rising again to torturing shrillness.

For minutes he stood watching, listening. At last he set a double watch on the bridge and went below. He knew at last what fear of the unknown meant. He knew at last that his ignorance and obstinacy had put his ship at the mercy of something he could not understand or control.

“Murder!” The word hammered and clanged through his brain. “Murder! That was the doctor’s word. Said I was sending Tom to his death!”

Passengers huddled in groups, whispering, crying, cursing, utterly demoralized as he made his way through the luxurious lounge toward the deck A cabins. He knew it would be wise to stop, to reassure them, to check the panic that was running like wildfire in their midst. He knew also that he couldn’t do it. His brain was numb with shock. He couldn’t console these terrified people. He was terrified himself, sick and cold and stupid with terror.

He groaned as he hurried to Number 14. The door of the room stood wide open. Sunset light painted it blood-red. Its silence was

horrible. A taunt—a threat—a prelude to disaster! He saw Mr. Amyas look in.

“Where is he? Where is Tom Everett?”

Mr. Amyas did not at first reply. He looked intently at the captain’s altered face; then:

“You know—at last?”

“Yes, yes! I’ve seen—the Thing . . . the damned whistling Thing!”

Mr. Amyas nodded. “I was there. I ran down to look for the colonel while you were watching the mate. The cabin was empty then. I’m afraid we’re too late. He’s gone.”

“Gone!” The word burst from the captain’s white lips. He seized his companion’s arm. His eyes were tortured. “Overboard?”

“No! No! It’s worse than that. Eldred Vernon has become a permanent tenant now.”

Captain Ross frowned in a fierce effort to follow the incomprehensible statement.

“I mean that Vernon has taken possession of your friend—body *and soul!* Colonel Everett appears to be in the smoking-room at this moment. In reality he’s no more there than you or I. Vernon possesses him. Vernon is walking and talking in the body of Colonel Everett.”

“But Tom—Tom, himself! Where is he, then?”

“A slave in bondage. In bondage so long as his body is possessed by Vernon. Suffering the torments of the damned. He is still able to think, to feel, to remember, but he is helpless. Vernon has overpowered him, taken his house from him. He’s like a prisoner lying gagged and bound in some dark cellar of it.”

“Go on, Mr. Amyas, go on!” The other’s voice was harsh with grief. “What will happen to my passengers—my ship—to all of us, now?”

“I do not know. I can only guess. But I think not one of us will live to see land again. Your ship may be found—sometime—somewhere—a derelict, a mystery like the *Marie Celeste!*”

“There must be a way out. There must be a way.”

"Only by destroying Eldred Vernon."

"How? How? D'you mean kill"—a look of awful enlightenment dawned in the captain's eyes—"you mean—I must kill—Tom Everett?"

"I don't know. I don't know." Mr. Amyas's brown face showed a network of lines and wrinkles. "I can only recall an affair I was once concerned in—an exorcism and a sacrifice—to drive out a devil."

"—to drive out a devil! Tell me what you know!"

And in the haunted silence of Number 14 Mr. Amyas told it.

5

"COLONEL EVERETT! Colonel Everett!" Mark called after the tall figure just stepping from the smoke-room to the deck outside. "You promised to tell me that tale about your tiger-hunt after tea."

The man paused on the threshold and half turned back to the boy. Mark, dashing across to him, drew up with a start about a yard away.

"I beg your pardon. I thought you were—" His serious slate-gray eyes flashed to the man's face, then to his dark green necktie, his collar, his gray tweeds—even his sports-shoes didn't escape the quick, keen scrutiny. "I—have you borrowed the colonel's clothes?"

The boy's clear, surprised tone seemed to ring out like a bell in the room.

"Borrowed my own clothes! I *am* the colonel! What's the idea, Mark? Is this a riddle? Or, are you giving me an intelligence test?"

The boy stood absolutely still. Quite suddenly he drew back, a look of horror dawning on his pale, intelligent face.

"You're not the colonel. You've got black hair and your skin is yellow and you're older—much older. Where is Colonel Everett? I want him."

Men were looking at the pair now, peering over the tops of

their papers; glancing up from writing-tables. Desultory bits of talk now ceased altogether. Everyone seemed suddenly aware of a crisis of peculiar significance between Mark and the man in gray tweeds.

The latter looked down with cold venom. "Don't make a little fool of yourself!" His low voice reached Mark's ear alone. "If you ever say such a thing again to me I'll—*punish you*. No good running to your Mr. Amyas either; he won't be able to interfere much longer."

He went out quickly, leaving Mark staring, shivering, sick with fright. The glint of those cold eyes! The hate in that low-pitched voice!

"What's wrong, kid? What did he say?" A good-natured young fellow close by drew the boy over to a group in a corner. "Queer sort of man, that Colonel Everett! He's a bit annoyed with all of us today. Liver or something!"

Mark's white, drawn face did not relax. He shivered convulsively, tried to speak, failed. One of the group rose with an exclamation, glass in hand. "Look here, old man." He put a hand on Mark's shoulder, held the glass to his lips with the other. "Take a sip of this and tell us what it's all about."

The boy drank, choked, dropped his head down on his knees—a huddled, frantic heap of misery.

"Better get the doctor. The little chap's ill."

The good-natured young fellow went to one of the doors, collided with two men about to enter. They were Mr. Amyas and Captain Ross.

"Ill? Mark?"

They listened to the young man's hasty, confused explanation and hurried to the boy. He looked exhausted and was leaning back with half-closed eyes, his features twitching, his delicate hands clenched tightly.

It took Mr. Amyas some minutes to get a word out of him. Captain Ross waited with a pinched gray look on his altered face.

"He was—awfully, *awfully* angry! As if he wanted to kill me!" Mark gasped. "It's that man! It's the prince! He said he was Colonel Everett—he's wearing his clothes—so I thought at first—"

Captain Ross exchanged a somber look with Mr. Amyas, who was supporting the boy.

"Oh! Oh! There he is whistling for me! And I don't like it—I don't like it!" Mark clapped his hands over his ears, dropped them again in bewildered fright. "It's in my head—the tune! Oh!—oh! I wish it would stop. It's—beastly!"

A strange silence fell on the rest. To no one but the boy was any whistling audible. The good-natured young man winked and touched his forehead significantly.

"Oh! Oh!" wailed the boy; "it's that funny old song—my nurse used to sing it to me. *Kathleen Mavourneen!* Oh, can't you make it stop?"

Mr. Amyas lifted him to his feet, put an arm about him. Above the boy's head he met the captain's eyes again.

"I'll get the doctor to give you something so that you won't hear it any more. Come along to my room. No need to be afraid of anything. You're quite right—that wasn't Colonel Everett. Come along. I'll explain. You'll be all right in a few minutes."

The last red rays of the setting sun flashed on the boy's face as he and his companion crossed the room and went out.

"What the deuce!" The good-natured young man stared at the doorway through which the two had vanished. "Not the colonel! Is the boy a bit touched? He seemed such a bright lad, I thought."

Captain Ross glowered. "Brighter than all the rest of us put together, it appears. That was *not* Colonel Everett."

"Good lord! What! You don't mean it! I'd have staked my last shirt—"

"Not Colonel Everett," repeated the captain in grim, heavy accents. "I don't think it's any use to warn you, but keep clear of him—if you can!"

He stalked out.

"Raving!" a young man in flannels drawled. "There seems to be something that breeds lunatics on the S.S. *Dragon*. What is at the bottom of all this? Whistling and hysterics! Joke's wearing thin. I'm fed up."

A stout, quiet man, playing patience, voiced his opinion in the

manner of one accustomed to authority. "I advise you to take Captain Ross seriously — and literally."

The flanneled one attempted to register world-weary contempt, but his smooth young face betrayed him into sulky resentment.

6

MR. AMYAS RETURNED. He stood for a moment with his back to the light in a doorway, his black eyes raking the room—very quiet, not a hair out of place, and yet he gave an impression of most desperate haste and disorder.

"Has anyone seen Doctor Fielding?"

A chorus of anxious voices answered. No one had seen the doctor lately. Was the boy bad? They'd go and search. The quiet, sleepy atmosphere became charged with electricity. Some dashed off to find Doctor Fielding. The remainder pressed for information.

"Heart," Mr. Amyas stated briefly. "He's collapsed. Seems to have had a bad shock. Ah, here's Fielding—"

"Yes. It's the boy. Quickly!"

The passengers saw a look of understanding flash between the two men as they hurried away.

"Mystery! Crime! Adventure!" the man in flannels sneered.

"Victim guaranteed every two hours."

"You rather underestimate the time." The stout man was putting away his patience cards. "However, optimism is a privilege of youth."

"Oh, go to hell!" said the flanneled one. But he said it under his breath, and only the trembling flame of the lighted match in his unsteady fingers made response. He walked toward a doorway.

"Er—look out for fog."

The quiet man stowed away his pocket-pack. His tone was perfectly casual.

"Fog! What d'you mean—fog?"

"Ran into some just before tea, I heard. Perhaps I should say—it ran into us."

"I know there was a hullabaloo. The mate got hysterics! But you don't suppose I think—"

"No! No!" the quiet man seemed really shocked at the idea. "Of course not. I know you don't."

The young man violently disappeared. The quiet man sat back in the attitude of one who awaits news. Several of those who had rushed off to find the doctor now returned. They seemed worried.

"Fog?" inquired the quiet man.

"What the devil makes you harp on fog?" one of them inquired.

"I was on deck B before tea," was the reply. "I've seen that sort of—fog, before! In North Borneo. Lived out there twenty years. It's apt to—er, hang about. Like poison-gas. More deadly, though."

"Well, you're right, as it happens," a muscular man in a Fair-isle sweater conceded. "There's a rum patch of fog or mist or something drifting around near the wireless room. I heard that everlasting whistle going strong and thought I'd do a spot of investigating. Almost ran into the fog. Could have sworn the whistling came from it."

No one questioned his impression. He went on with increasing embarrassment.

"Don't know what came over me. The thing looked—well, I funk'd! Legged it back here as fast as I knew how!"

"Very sensible," approved the quiet man. "My experience has been that it only—er, functions in the open air, for some reason."

In a cabin close by, Mr. Amyas and the doctor looked down at Mark's quiet, unconscious face.

"He'll do for a few hours. That stuff'll make him sleep. Only question is whether we oughtn't to let him go—now—easily! Seems damnable to bring him back to face that devil again. The boy *knows*. And he's heard the death-signal. Why let him wake? Why let him face tomorrow? What d'you say, Amyas?"

The other nodded. "I agree. He mustn't come back to that. How long will your stuff hold him? Four or five hours?"

"Easily. More likely seven or eight."

"Five will take us to midnight. We'll leave it until then. Captain Ross is sending out S.O.S.'s. Going to transfer to a home-bound ship, if possible. Best give him another injection at midnight if no ship answers us—in time."

No need to harass the doctor before it became necessary. Mr. Amyas, therefore, did not admit that he had no hope of their S.O.S. messages getting through. He'd seen what the young man in the Fair-isle sweater had seen. More! He had looked inside the wireless room. No operator was there. A cloud of fog hung over it. It was not humanly possible for any man to sit in the place with that shrieking menace in his ears. There was no chance of outside help. The fight must be lost or won on board within the next few hours.

He looked down at the helpless, doomed little figure, turned toward the door, stepped back for a brief farewell. "I promised you a gift in memory of this trip together. You shall have it—before midnight, Mark."

A PALE, CHILL TWILIGHT LINGERED in the sky. Electric lights shone from reflectors on deck. The sea ran smooth, gray-green below the ship's steep sides. Mr. Amyas looked about him with quick, bright eyes. Passengers—those not demoralized by fear, those who hadn't seen and didn't believe in fogs and foam and fantasies—were below, dressing for dinner. Those who did believe were dressing too. It didn't get you anywhere to encourage thoughts of that sort. A good dinner—dancing—lights—music—they'd forget it soon!

Mr. Amyas caught sight of the third mate making for the captain's bridge. Lights were on all over the ship. He thought how brilliant the *S.S. Dragon* must look, foaming on through the dark water, gleaming, illumined, swift. What passing craft would guess she was a ship of the damned? That she was bearing

hundreds of souls to hell? That on her long, white, level decks, behind her lighted port-holes, in luxurious cabins and beautifully decorated saloons, horror stalked, biding its time?

His eyes followed the third mate. He was staggering uncertainly. He climbed up to the bridge with painful effort. The strong lights flooded him, showed a ghastly, twisted face of fear. He spoke with Captain Ross. Bad news, evidently. The captain's gesture was eloquent. He dismissed the officer, turned away, and stood frowning. Mr. Amyas went up to him.

"That devil's got us, all right." Captain Ross turned fiercely. "Five men driven from the wheel this last hour. That infernal whistling fog! And I find it's the same with the wireless. He's cutting us off completely. What's the use of waiting, Amyas? I tell you it's madness to let him corner us like this. Every hour my ship's more at his mercy. Tom Everett is dead—murdered—I murdered him! It's Vernon, not Everett, walking round now, mocking us, destroying us. I'm going to shoot him. D'you hear me? It's time to *do* something. My ship will be helpless soon — driving blind — lost! There's only my first mate left to steer now—until that cursed whistling Thing drives him off too!"

"Only till midnight!" the other spoke with strong entreaty. "Only a few hours more! I know your friend is still alive. It will indeed be murder if you shoot him now. At midnight, I swear to you, Everett will be himself again. For a few minutes he will be the man you've always known—and loved."

"How d'you know? It's only a guess in the dark. And even if we wait—even if Tom does come back, he may not tell me how to destroy Vernon! You're only guessing all along the line. Why should Tom know this secret that you don't—and I don't? No! I must shoot that devil while there's a chance. It's monstrous— it's madness to let him destroy us inch by inch."

Mr. Amyas looked at him and said no more. He'd been afraid of this. The strain was inhuman. It passed the line of what could be endured. He turned to leave the bridge. Queerly enough, his submission touched some secret spring that protest and entreaty could not reach.

"Come back! Come back! Help me, Amyas! I can't watch here alone."

In the huge, handsome main saloon, unobtrusively reserved in gray oak and clouded-green upholstery, groups of cardplayers worked in isolated quartets, tense, serious, absorbed. Mostly elderly and middle-aged. The younger set was dancing. To this sanctum, Colonel Everett entered, stood observant, bright cruel eyes raking the unconscious players.

He walked, his accustomed firm decisive tread, now curiously sinuous and smooth, to a table where the Marchmonts and the Hore-Smiths were engaged in a long-drawn interesting battle. Wealthy, autocratic, exclusive, they represented a high average of breeding and brains.

"I shouldn't risk that."

Colonel Everett stabbed a finger down on the card which Mrs. Hore-Smith had led.

"Dummy," he went on, "has only queen, seven and three of clubs—ace and ten of diamonds—nine, five and two of hearts—and knave, ten, five, four and two of spades."

Four amazed, resentful faces were raised to meet the colonel's hard glare. Mr. Marchmont picked up the cards he had put face-down on the table and reversed them.

"You're right. Very clever. I've seen it done before—in Siam. Perhaps you'd reserve your—er—tricks until later!"

Cold malice leaped in Colonel Everett's eyes. "Reserve my—er—tricks until later!" he mocked. "Later! You gibbering, conventional puppets! There won't be any later for you. After midnight I rule here! Even now—"

Mrs. Marchmont, very handsome, very haughty, cut him short. "If you must talk, go elsewhere. Otherwise—"

"You don't want to talk?"

"Nor to listen."

He nodded and made a quick, insolent gesture. His eyes showed a gleam of wicked white. "Then don't talk. Play!"

The two couples, with strained, altered faces, resumed. In silence—in absolute silence they played. Colonel Everett sat back smoking, his long legs crossed, one foot wagging in perpetual

motion. Not a single word escaped from any of the players. They sat stiffly. They moved hands and arms only. Their eyes sought his—read in his evil, mocking glance what cards to put down. Colonel Everett played out a whole rubber thus, merely using the Marchmonts and Hore-Smiths as physical mediums. And they knew what was happening to them. Their wills impotently battled his.

The rubber finished, Colonel Everett stood up and waved a hand that seemed boneless at the wrist. "It is not everyone who would respect your wishes so perfectly, Mrs. Marchmont. Well, we've had enough bridge now."

His sinister, sidelong glance collected eyes all over the room. Inexplicably to themselves, the players looked up simultaneously.

"We'll go and watch the dancing for a time. This game begins to pall."

He sat down, lighted a fresh cigarette, waited. Group after group rose from the tables. Well-fed, expensively attired sheep ready for the slaughter. The threaded a decorous way to the entrances and passed out of sight.

Colonel Everett rose to watch them go. Lucifer, Son of the Morning! So had *he* towered in dark lust to rule!

On the dancing-floor, color flashed like gorgeous birds among a forest of black coats. Musicians combined in assaulting every primitive urge possessed by man. Ordinary lights were turned off. The dancers swayed through shafts of green and purple, blue, red and yellow.

At Colonel Everett's entrance the shifting floodlights died. Brilliant white lights sprang to life from every bulb in the place. The dancers laughed. A buzz of talk reverberated. Dick Redlands glanced up in annoyance. The most beautiful girl on board was sitting out with him. He adored her. He was letting Wanda know about it and she seemed not uninterested. What fool had turned on the electric lights?

Wanda's grave, wistful, profoundly gray eyes turned to the doorway where Colonel Everett's evening clothes seemed to

invest him with quite regal dignity. He bowed to her across the dance-floor and advanced.

"Look here, Wanda! You're not going to dance with that bounder." Dick lost his head in sudden, plunging, nameless fear. "It's impossible! He's . . . he's—"

"What is he?"

Dick was unable to say. The girl's black head with its narrow wreath of pearls was turned from him. Her fingers lay unresponsive in his clasp. Her quickened breath fluttered the gauzy petals of a flower at her breast.

"Wanda!" he urged. "No! Don't dance with him. There's something wrong—he's a rotter—a—"

The colonel was bowing low before Wanda now, drawing her to her feet, melting into the dance with the girl's supple figure held close. Dick stared after them. He was afraid—damnably afraid—and he didn't know at all what it was he feared. But his eyes followed the girl. Her face was turned to her partner's shoulder; his lips were close to her ear, moving, moving in ceaseless talk.

". . .but it won't last. It can't last, your beauty! You are only a shell. A lovely, painted, fragile shell. After tonight all your beauty will be gone. You'll be dead. Have you ever seen a body that's been in the water for a day or two? For a week? For a month? Very revolting indeed. Bloated—swollen—oh! most nauseating. And the fishes—"

On and on went the horrible whispering voice, painting its hellish pictures, destroying her body—her eyes—her hair—giving her loveliness to hideous death with sure, unrelenting strokes. And, gripped in his iron arms, she had to listen. Her imagination flared to torturing life as all ability to struggle, to cry out, failed her.

"There are so many creatures of the sea that will come starved to rob you of this beauty you love. It would be a waste of time for your latest adorer to go on worshipping at your shrine. He shall see you day by day as you rot—and rot. I heard what he said. He shall live—and regret his living!"

Dick, watchful, not with anger, cold with terror, held in his

place by baffling control, saw Wanda's profile as she passed before him—suffering—tortured.

Next time the pair came round, the colonel stopped, led Wanda to her seat, set her in it like a doll, then walked away in the direction of the band. Dick found himself unable to move a finger.

Music struck up again. An old tune. No one got up to dance. No one moved at all.

Colonel Everett stood as one crowned and robed with authority. Slowly, as if a heavy, jeweled cloak dragged at his heels, he turned and walked away.

The band played with maddening repetition. On and on waisted the sad little melody. . . *Kathleen Mavourneen*. . . on. . . and on. . . and on. . .

8

ON ONE OF HIS HALF-HOURLY VISITS TO MARK, Mr. Amyas saw a tall, hatefully familiar figure standing outside the room. Colonel Everett's face, barely recognizable now in its dark, lean wolfishness, confronted him with a grin. "Very conscientious! Well, make the most of your time. You won't be sick-visiting much longer. I'll take the boy off your hands soon—very soon."

Mr. Amyas opened the door and closed it softly, abruptly in the other's face. He felt better for the small act of defiance. After midnight! . . . He choked back the cold, numbing sense of defeat that threatened, and crossed over to the bunk where Doctor Fielding watched.

"I've something to say to you," he began in a low, urgent voice. "No use telling you before—I wasn't sure of Captain Ross. And it's a remote chance anyhow. However—"

He explained briefly.

"I see." The doctor looked up, his eyes dead fires in a worn, ravaged face, "It all hangs on whether Everett *knows*, and if he does know, whether he will have the chance to communicate his

vital knowledge. The only certain factor in the crisis is that Everett *as* Everett does momentarily take possession of himself again."

His companion assented.

"I admit my knowledge is limited. But I'm staking everything on it. And I have persuaded the captain to this point of view. About Mark—"

"Yes. If Everett speaks, Mark won't need the second injection. Very well. I'll wait for fifteen minutes after midnight. Then—if no message comes—I will use the needle."

The corridor was empty as Mr. Amyas went out again.

"I don't know," he confessed when he regained the bridge. "why the infernal fog leaves us alone up here. Vernon is reserving his powers, leaving us to the last—his strongest enemies. There must be laws and barriers in every state of existence, and Vernon must be prevented from touching us—yet!"

"My first mate's given up now, driven away," the captain informed him. "There's no one at the wheel. Luckily the ship's heading north, right out of the fairway. No danger of a collision. We're going dead slow, too. Three more hours of this. Three more hours! My God, Amyas, if Everett doesn't come—doesn't tell me!"

"He will come."

"But he may not know. He may not know."

For the hundredth time Mr. Amyas reassured him. For the hundredth time Captain Ross turned to pace up and down the bridge, his ears tortured by the incessant, insistent whistle, rising to maniacal fury, then dwindling to thin, distant, unearthly piping. He had tried stuffing his ears with cotton-wool. It was useless—worse than useless. It increased the torment; his brain had felt like a hollow tube; the whistle shrieked through it, redhot, searing as a flame.

And up and down the long, bare, gleaming deck below, to and fro, drifting, shifting, a horrible, seeking, wraith-like thing of fog loomed, hovered, eddied, wavered to nothingness, re-formed once more.

And northward through the dark sea drove the

ship—haunted—lost—blind! her slow, discouraged heart beating in heavy rhythm. Northward to her doom.

Almost midnight. On the bridge Captain Ross and Mr. Amyas kept watch. Almost midnight. A new moon. Hard, bright stars. No wind. And the low continuous wash and ripple of following seas as the *S.S. Dragon* drove on her unguided, crooked course.

In Number 14 on deck A, its occupant moved with quick, uneasy steps. The sinuous grace, the wicked, glancing eyes were changing. Something of fear, of doubt, of grief showed every now and then, like a star's clear shining between dark clouds.

"It's very far off—very far off." His voice was crisper in spite of its note of anxious, painful doubt. "I can't remember—I don't even know what it is I must remember."

A sudden convulsive shudder took him. A sudden darkness dimmed and blurred his features. His head went back with a jerk. His hands grew taut with fingers that clenched and crisped like talons.

"Fool! Fool! What am I doing? What am I thinking? Almost midnight. A few short minutes and I will pass through. The door stands wide. I will pass through."

He glared at the tall figure reflected in the long glass of his wardrobe, leaned forward as if speaking to the image mirrored there. "In a few more minutes I possess you utterly. Body—living human soul—all mine!"

The face in the glass returned his glare, grew gray and wavered. Its harsh and wicked lines smoothed out. Thought, emotion, effort showed in the mirrored face—stirring—changing it as wind changes the face of water. "No! No! Stay here. You shall not go! I command. I command. I rule you now."

But the eyes in the mirror did not match the voice. They were steady, resolute, brave. And a new voice answered the challenging words. "I am Tom Everett. I am myself. And I must speak with the captain of this ship."

He turned from the mirror. All soldier now—squared shoulders, erect, decisive, disciplined. He moved toward the door; his hand was on the latch when his body was torn and wrenched as if by torture. He fell against the wall. "I must—speak—"

His voice grew thick and indistinct. His hands made blind, arrested movements. He lifted his feet as if he stood in quicksands and fell with a choking cry and hands at his throat. Stubbornly he dragged himself upright, dragged open the door and stumbled into the corridor. Moving more strongly now with every step he took, he made for the deck above. From the bridge Captain Ross saw him coming, heard a faint calling through the night.

"Captain! Captain! Are you keeping watch?"

"Here! On the bridge! Here, Tom, here!..

The colonel moved swiftly in reply. He seemed to slip his fetters, came running. Next moment he had gained the bridge and stood with clear gaze on his friend.

Mr. Amyas fell back. It was between these two now.

"Tell me! Tell me quickly! I am ready. I will give all I have—body and soul, to save you!"

Everett looked deep into the agonized face confronting him. "Yes—I see you are—quite ready."

A shrill piping sounded far off—drew nearer—nearer.

"Now!" cried the colonel. He thrust a thin, long knife, trophy of the East, into Captain Ross's hand. "We must go together. We must fight him together, afterward! Will you come with me?"

Below, the decks were blotted out. Fog rolled up . . . blind white world of terror . . . closing in with the whistling, tearing shrieking of the damned.

Captain Ross took the knife, grasped it strongly. Understanding, then profound triumphant joy illuminated his worn face.

"Ah! Now I see the way! Wait for me, Tom! Together . . . yes! . . . together!"

He flung up an arm and struck with sure, strong aim. Everett fell, the knife deep in his heart. The captain pulled his sharp blade free again, stood up. One tremendous shout—thunder-clap bellowing above the wind's shrill squeal. The bright blade flashed again, sank to its hilt in the captain's own broad breast.

As he fell, stars and moon and foaming sea were blotted out from Mr. Amyas. The night was filled with the howl of rushing

winds. Blackness descended. The ship spun crazy and demented under him.

In mortal terror he heard the thrashing roar of battle all about him. His heart grew colder than his icy hands. A world of yelling darkness where all the winds of hell tore loose.

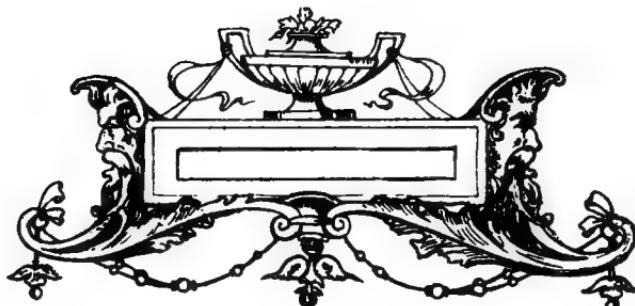
But louder than winds, high above the devilish tumult shrilled the whistle, ceaseless, shrieking its menace, its everlasting hate. . .

Utter silence. Silence, huge as the empty dawn of time. A wide, sweet sense of freedom filled the universe.

The watcher stood, breathing the clean salt wind, blessing friendly stars and moonlit water.

He woke like a dreamer and looked at his watch. Five minutes—only five minutes that agony had endured after all!

He knelt by the quiet dead, profoundly sleeping, utterly at rest. They were freed as Mr. Amyas knew himself to be. The dark soul of Eldred Vernon was destroyed.



Coming Next Issue

McGrath rounded the bend in the trail, every nerve tense and alert, expecting anything — except what he actually saw. His startled eyes hung on the grisly object for an instant, and then swept the forest walls. Nothing stirred there. A dozen feet back from the trail, visibility vanished in a ghoulish twilight, where *anything* might lurk unseen. McGrath dropped to his knee beside the figure that lay in the trail before him.

It was a man, spread-eagled, hands and feet bound to four pegs driven deeply in the hard-packed earth; a black-bearded, hook-nosed, swarthy man. "Ahmed!" muttered McGrath. "Ballville's Arab servant! God!"

For it was not the binding cords that brought the glaze to the Arab's eyes. A weaker man than McGrath might have sickened at the mutilations which keen knives had wrought on the man's body. McGrath recognized the work of an expert in the art of torture. Yet a spark of life still throbbed in the tough frame of the Arab. McGrath's gray eyes grew bleaker as he noted the position of the victim's body, and his mind flew back to another, grimmer jungle, and a half-flayed black man pegged out on a path as a warning to the white man who dared to invade the forbidden land.

He cut the cords, shifted the dying man to a more comfortable position. It was all he could do. He saw the delirium ebb momentarily in the bloodshot eyes, saw recognition glimmer there. Clots of bloody foam splashed the matted beard. The lips writhed soundlessly, and McGrath glimpsed the bloody stump of a severed tongue.

The black-nailed figures began scrabbling in the dust. They shook, clawing erratically, but with purpose. McGrath bent close, tense with interest, and saw crooked lines grow under the quivering fingers. With the last effort of an iron will, the Arab was tracing a message in the characters of his own language. McGrath recognized the name: "Richard Ballville"; it was followed by "danger", and the hand waved weakly up the trail; then — and McGrath stiffened convulsively — "Constance". One final effort of the dragging finger traced "John De Al—" Suddenly the frame was convulsed by one last sharp agony; the lean, sinewy had knotted spasmodically and then fell limp. Ahmed ibn Suleyman was beyond vengeance or mercy.

McGrath rose, dusting his hands, aware of the tense stillness of the grim woods around him; aware of a faint rustling in their depths that was not caused by any breeze.

the hunger of a black god led to an encounter with

THE GRISLY HORROR

by Robert E. Howard

It Is Written

We regret the error through which a number of readers received the December issue of *EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN*, rather than *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, even though some wrote saying that they enjoyed EXTU. Just how this happened in the first place remains a bizarre, gruesome, and frightening mystery to the editor. However, all who wrote in were sent copies of the issue they should have received, and in instances where a reader sought out, and was fortunate enough to find that issue of MOH on his local newsstand, we extended his subscription one issue. Mislabeled boxes might explain in part. Last month (January) we received two boxes labelled *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* (Spring), which turned out to be *EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN*, March. Now if the persons whose job it was to put the copies into the envelope opened such a box, and found the copies face down, as often happens, a considerable number of errors might occur, and wrong magazines get in to the mail, before anyone noticed. Perhaps that is what happened.

We also receive complaints about the delay in filling orders for back issues. I pass these on to the subscription and back issue department, and talk to persons higher up, but there is very little that the editor can do about it. The situation is this: there is room in our offices, where these orders are filled, for

only a relatively small number of back issues of MOH, etc., at a time. When an order comes in, ordered issues that are on hand are sent out at once. Issues not available at the moment (and there's no telling at any given moment which ones these will be) are requisitioned from the warehouse, as soon as we have a sizeable list of them. We ask for a half dozen or a dozen at a time — but do not wait, of course, for a dozen orders for a particular issue. Getting them from the warehouse is a long and laborious process, and we feel frustrated here constantly about the time it takes.

Richard Kyle writes from California: "The February *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* is a good one. . . . Keller's story was especially good — not quite a 'O', but very, very good. REH's yarn seemed abysmally bad, one of the worst by him I have ever read. (In fact, upon reflection, I think it is the worst.) Goldin would've ranked higher if his tale had been more well-written; as it is, the writing is too often merely commonplace when the subject calls for simplicity. *The Roc Raid* is sort of charming. Unless there was a rash of women-in-aviator's-clothing yarns, I'd suspect that Tuttle had recently read George Allan England's *The Flying Legion*. (The nurses' reaction to 'Andrews' was a bit much, though. With writers of this sort, one has a time deciding whether it is put-on or perversity — or naivete.)

"The cover colors were especially striking. . . .

"Your reminiscence in *The Editor's Page* awakened memories. I first discovered science fiction when I was ten — in 1939 — but it wasn't until three years later that I moved to an area where the new magazines were regularly displayed and back issues were available. (By then, times had improved financially, because of the war, and I had a good deal more to spend.) *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION* was my magazine. I haunted the newsstand on the day it came out, I plundered the used magazine stores (all you could buy, five cents apiece) until I had a complete run of Campbell's *Astounding*, which I seemed to read night and day — strange, strange fascinating stories with an indefinable atmosphere that now seems so commonplace (because the country has become Campbell *Astounding*) but seemed so unusual then. And then — almost simultaneously — I got back into Tremaine *Astoundings*, and read all of that great period of '34 and '35. And *Wonder Stories* with Laurence Manning and *The Time Stream*, and the terrific letter column. . . . And in the meantime, I'd found a place with a complete run of Gernsback *Amazings* . . . and plunged into them. And then — by now it was late '43 and I was 14 — I discovered *UNKNOWN* and *STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES* and *COSMIC SCIENCE FICTION* in one big lump. I damn near read myself to death.

"(Back in '39 and '40, I'd read the first *SCIENCE WONDER STORIES*, with a serial I was years completing, and a perfectly awful story by Kenny McDowd, called *The Marble Virgin*; Burroughs' *The Gods of Mars*, which had a tremendous impact on me then, and still reads extremely well; and other magazines and books, the latter mainly Jules Verne and Carl H. Claudy. My appetite for the field was ravenous, but I

just couldn't find enough to satisfy it. It's surprising how hard it is for a ten-year-old to find things that interest and excite him, if they are at all unusual. His physical world is so circumscribed.) Soon (in '43) I was reading through *FUTURE* and *SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY* (I much preferred your issues to Hornig's) and *ASTONISHING STORIES*, *SUPER SCIENCE STORIES*, *THRILLING WONDER STORIES*, and *STARTLING STORIES* along with keeping up with the current titles. I even started reading Palmer's books, mainly out of desperation. God, it was a perpetual orgy there for a while. (I was also reading pulp adventure stories by the bushel — *DOC SAVAGE* and all — detective stories in immense quantities, tons of comic books, and even huge numbers of 'worth-while books') In looking back, I don't know how in the name of heaven I managed to read all that. I swear I could not do it today if my life depended on it. In one week, I distinctly remember reading *Last and First Men* and *Odd John* by Stapleton, and two books by Algernon Blackwood: *Julius LeVallon* — or somesuch — and *The Centaur*. Incredible.

"It was quite an experience. And I learned something from it that few others could. In the space of — probably — three years, I read virtually every science fiction magazine that had been published to date (except the Clayton *Astoundings* and *MIRACLE SCIENCE AND FANTASY STORIES*). And I really did not read them in any order. That is, although I was reading mostly Campbell *Astoundings* in the beginning, other magazines, from 1926 on, were always mixed with the ASFs.

"When Sam Moskowitz first began to speak of the loss of a 'sense of wonder', many of his critics insisted that it was a fiction — that a 'sense of wonder' was simply the quality one ascribed to those first science fiction tales one read. But

this simply wasn't so for me. Campbell's *Astounding* of the '40s remains my favorite science fiction magazine – but it never evoked a 'sense of wonder'. I loved the magazine, but I cannot recall a single story that possessed that quality. I did find it in the Tremaine *Astounding* for '34 and '35; in some issues of *WONDER STORIES* (I'm a little unsure of the dates, but mainly during the Manning period and the later quarterlies, I think); and in the Gernsback *Amazings*. I don't know if this matches up with Moskowitz's thoughts, but I suspect it does. Sloane's *Amazing* had a touch of it from time to time, mainly when Campbell was writing for it. *THRILLING WONDER STORIES* never had it, nor *STARTLING STORIES*. Nor did Palmer's magazines, of course. And the later Tremaine *Astounding*, with H. P. Lovecraft's stories, frequently evoked a sense of wonder. Tremaine's *COMET* had a bit of it, but only a bit. But Campbell's *Astounding* never did.

UNKNOWN'S Sinister Barrier did have it, however. I've always felt that somehow *UNKNOWN* went off in a direction Campbell never really intended – that that first lead-novel was meant to take the writers and readers (and Campbell himself) into another land that was never really found. *But Without Horns and Fear* and *They* have some of the quality one senses in *Sinister Barrier*, but it is not as clearly defined.

I learned something else from *UNKNOWN*: it's a wise publisher who does his living best to tell what is in his magazine. I passed up a couple of the early issues of the large-size *UNKNOWN WORLDS* – with their 'dignified' covers – because I did not really understand what the contents were like. I thought the stories would be the kind I liked, but I didn't really know, and I didn't want to invest a whole-quarter on speculation. Cartier had been drafted by then, so not

only was the cover misleading, so were the interior illustrations. Ever since then – or ever since I discovered what I had been missing – I have been convinced that a publisher should do his dead level best (within the bounds of a reasonable budget) to tell the readers *exactly* what is inside his magazine. The covers should deliver all the goods visually, and so should the interiors – and to fail to render the exact nature of the stories, to use 'arty' covers or humorous ones, or ones that play down the more 'undignifiedly' exciting aspects of the magazine, and to use illustrations that are all style and little illustration – to do this is to hurt circulation. There are a lot of thirteen-year-old Richard Kyles in this world, of all ages. It is true that detective magazines seem to do best without illustration, but that is because those magazines are not selling *real* murders – the readers don't really want the blood and guts of true murders and mayhem, they want *mystery*. Nor, I think, do horror magazine readers want actual descriptions of horror – what they want is the *atmosphere* of horror, quite another thing, and something that *can* be depicted. The decline of the science fiction magazine sales can be related almost directly to the decline in the *serious* imaginative elements in the covers and interior illustrations, in the truly imaginative atmosphere. There are other factors, of course. Some that brought about the pictorial decline itself. But that decline was a major factor in itself, I am convinced. "

It's possible, of course, that the author of *The Roc Raid* (which seems to be controversial in that it is bringing forth numerous extreme comments from readers both favorable and unfavorable) had read *The Flying Legion*, by George Allan England – but I doubt that he would have needed to have read it recently (shortly before writing the story) to have

been influenced by it. A writer may be strongly influenced by elements in a story read long ago — even one which, for the most part, he has forgotten; and sometimes this influence can be far stronger than the effects of material read much closer to the time he is actually writing something which, when we read it, suggests various influences. Conjectures are risky when specific information is not to be had. We know that the England novel appeared in 1919, and was published in book form in 1920; so if Mr. Tuttle read it, he could have read it as early as either of those two years. We do not know when *The Roc Raid* was written; but knowing that there was often a year's gap between Farnsworth's Wright's acceptance of a story and his publication of it, 1927 or 1928 seems the most reasonable dates for composition. 1929 is very unlikely, though not impossible. Again, we do not know whether the story was submitted to *WEIRD TALES* first of all, or whether the author tried *AMAZING STORIES* or the Munsey magazines first (not to mention other possibilities). However, since von Hindenberg is President of the German Republic in the story, the odds are good that it was not written before 1925.

The capacity of an eager (and apparently swift) reader of ten-to-thirteen is truly awe-inspiring! I managed to cover a vast amount of printed territory myself at that period, and was always miffed when some elder person would aver that I couldn't have read closely or carefully, upon noting how quickly I finished a book or magazine. We may have missed more than we realized at the time, although perhaps the bulk of what we read did not have much below the surface to miss.

In my speech at the 1969 Lunacon I noted that the "sense of wonder" was not in the old magazines that Sam

Moskowitz, Don Wollheim, myself, and innumerable others loved so dearly and to some extent still love. The sense of wonder was in us and these stories stimulated it so as to give us the feeling that the wonder was in the stories themselves. Whether everyone has a "sense of wonder" is debatable, but what seems to be certain is that it is not stimulated in everyone by the same sort of material — and in many, perhaps, not by fiction at all. From the way I have heard some fans in former years talk about *AMAZING STORIES* under the editorship of Ray Palmer, I'm forced to conclude that the magazine *did* stimulate their senses of wonder. And a few stories in the 1939 issues I must confess, *did* so please me — but not many.

I remember *The Marble Virgin* with much fondness, as it is one of my favorite bad stories, a fascinating example of the Gernsback approach to science fiction gone wrong: so long as some accurate scientific facts are presented to the reader, any amount of incredible nonsense can go with it. I read some choice excerpts from it in my speech at the Lunacon, adding that there might not be time to tell the rest of the story. After finishing, the first request in the question period was to tell the rest of *The Marble Version*, which I did, with (I hope) appropriate gestures: it got a good laugh.

The Manning period in *WONDER STORIES* followed the death of the quarterly; it began with *The Man Who Awoke*, and this March 1933 issue went on sale in February — the final issue of *WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY* went on sale around December 15, 1932, and was dated Winter 1933; copies should have still been found on the stands by February, as the withdrawal time would most likely be in the second week of March; had there been a Spring 1933 issue, it would have been due to go

on sale around March 15. John Taine's *The Time Stream* ran in 1931/32.

John Leavitt writes from New Hampshire: "The cover was very good. I didn't like *The Roc Raid* much because of the almost *deus ex machina* ending. It always seems like cheating when an author does something like that. The 'Tale from Cornwall' was below par, but still good. There were no surprises or inventiveness in the Howard story. Any hack could have turned it out. The Goldin story was original and very entertaining. He reminds me, in some ways, of R. A. Lafferty. Your editorial was very good. 'Purists' have always irritated me."

Noel R. Perkins writes from Syracuse, Kansas: "Although I am partial to more traditional horror (Gothic — medieval — pre-20th century — antiquarian), I nevertheless truly enjoyed Goldin's tale. Ernst's serial looks as though it is going to be good, too."

C. J. Probert writes from Toronto: "I enjoyed everything this time.

"Maybe Goldin could write a series of tales in this locale, about the investigator or whatever he is. I *really* enjoyed that story.

"*The Noseless Horror* was confusing — the early mention of Ganja Singh's lack of nose convinced me that he was the horror. I didn't really get the feel of Howard.

"Both *The Duel of the Sorcerers* and *The Roc Raid* were vintage pieces, combining a lot of tried-and-true devices. I disagree — *The Roc Raid* read to me like a first effort, but then, you're an editor.

"I put *The Tailed Man of Cornwall* last because, although I've liked all the rest in this series, this one seemed merely silly.

"A big favor: Could you list the

stories in Clark Ashton Smith's *Lost Worlds*? I would be (more or less) eternally grateful."

I did not mention, in introducing Stephen Goldin's *For Services Rendered*, that this story was really the first in a series, since I wanted to see if any of you, the readers, would write in and ask if it was (hopefully) or say that it ought to be. Mr. Probert was the first to do so, but not the last.

I shall happily merit his (more or less) eternal gratitude by listing the contents of both of the early collections of Clark Ashton Smith's stories, published by Arkham House:

Out of Space and Time (1942): Clark Ashton Smith: *Master of Fantasy*, by August Derleth & Donald Wandrei; *The End of the Story; A Rendezvous in Averoigne; A Night in Malneant; The City of Singing Flame; The Uncharted Isle; The Second Interment; The Double Shadow; The Chain of Aforgomon; The Dark Eidolon; The Last Hieroglyph; Sadastor; The Death of Ilalotha; The Return of the Sorcerer; The Testament of Athammaus; The Weird of Avoost Wuthoqquan; Ubbo-Sathla; The Monster of the Prophecy; The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis; From the Crypts of Memory; The Shadows.*

Lost Worlds (1944): *The Tale of Satampra Zeiros; The Door to Saturn; The Seven Geases; The Coming of the White Worm; The Last Incantation; A Voyage to Sfanomoe; The Death of Malygris; The Holiness of Azederac; The Beast of Averoigne; The Empire of the Necromancers; The Isle of the Torturers; Necromancy in Naat; Xeethra; The Maze of Maal Dweb; The Flower-Women; The Demon of the Flower; The Plutonian Drug; The Planet of the Dead; The Gorgon; The Letter from Mohaun Los; The Light from Beyond; The Hunters from Beyond; The Treader of the Dust.*

We have reprinted several stories from

these volumes; and since the requests for Smith seem to be concentrated in tales from these out-of-print collections, most of the CAS we plan to re-use from for some time to come will be from one or the other of the two.

Judith B. Lee writes from Ferndale, Michigan: "The latest issue of MOH was, as a whole, very good. *The Tailed Man of Cornwall* was the best in the series so far, even though I am one of those who think of these as being Fairy Tales. *The Roc Raid* was good, as far as the story itself is concerned, but was a little too pre-occupied with details which proved that the author knew what he was talking about but, it seemed to me, bogged the story down a little. Then, too, it is hard to believe that a female could pull off the deception for so great a time. The ending was a bit much, so I have to rate it in last place. *The Noseless Horror* was good, but the coincidence of Cameron coming across the mummy of the very man he had deceived years before is a little difficult to accept, although I admit it is necessary to the story.

"*For Services Rendered* was very interesting, and I find nothing wrong with it. (Surprise!)

"*The Duel of the Sorcerers* seems to be the best story so far as it goes. I hope part two will be as interesting. I am partial to vampires and their ilk because I have not yet learned enough about them to satisfy me. . . .

"I liked the cover, and at first assumed it was to represent *The Roc Raid*, but as Rocs were feathered birds, I am not quite sure of this.

"The best feature of the magazine is the *It Is Written* section. I like to read what other readers have to say. I like the editorials also, although I sometimes find they are beyond my grasp, as was the one in the last issue. However, I was surprised to find that I was able to

understand almost all of the editorial in this issue."

I think you are right in placing the *Tales of Cornwall* within the orbit of Fairy Tales (as a number of other readers have done); but what is wrong here is not so placing it, but rather the assumption (which, happily, you do not make) that the Fairy Tale is something strictly for children or for childish tastes, and which an adult should not want to be caught reading.

Nothing could be more incorrect. The Fairy Tale is essentially a form of adult fiction and the great ones in literature were not written for children. (The genre was very popular, by the way, at the court of Louis XIVth — a court which can be accused of many misdemeanors, but hardly of juvenile tastes in reading matter.)

What happened was that after a century or so, the Fairy Tale went out of fashion, and descended from the library to the nursery in much the way that furniture from the drawing room, etc., was put in to the nursery, when no longer wanted, rather than thrown out. It was in the nineteenth century that the Fairy Tale became associated with childishness and children, as C. S. Lewis points out. In its best examples, it is actually a very sophisticated form of literature in which the naivete is merely a layer of deceptive simplicity; actually, the alert adult can get much more than a child out of a good Fairy Tale. As for the poorer examples, they are just as poor for the child's reading as for the adult's; again to second Mr. Lewis: fiction which is not worth an adult's re-reading is not worth a child's first reading.

History relates a number of fascinating cases where a woman successfully masqueraded as a man. Last century, a Tammany politician known as Murray Hill passed as a man for 30 years,

the deception only being discovered *post mortem*.

I'm pleased to hear that the editorial gave you no difficulty this time, but you should not think ill of yourself if some of the others (or perhaps some to come) were or are beyond you. They are written to discuss a very wide range of interests, and while I certainly do not work at making any one of them obscure, the fact remains that you (or any other reader) is going to find this or that one obscure when it deals with something that is not familiar to you. The ones which you find on your beam, as it were, may be very obscure to someone else.

Rick Stooker writes from Alton, Illinois: "It's hard to believe that the same person who wrote the Conan stories also wrote *The Noseless Horror*. Though that isn't half as bad as some of the stories I've recently seen attributed to Howard. Why don't you reprint some of his stories which were good enough to publish in his lifetime?

"*For Services Rendered* was a very entertaining story, which I wish your magazine had more of. Who is Stephen Goldin?

"*The Roc Raid* was very dull and boring. I'm too young to have seen the pulps first hand, but I imagine it was stories like this that killed them."

I'm afraid your imagination is off, as *The Roc Raid* was very well liked by *WEIRD TALES* readers in 1929; but I certainly would not argue with anyone (either in 1929 or 1970) who found it "dull and boring" because that is something inarguable. . . . Sadly, if you read the Conan stories closely, you will find in them as a whole, the same faults that can be found in *The Noseless Horror*, although the extent varies. I certainly would not have run it at all had I found it the worst story by this author

that I have ever read. I do not recall for sure whether the worst — to my taste — has been published or not, although there have been some published in which I found less merit than in this one.

Charles Hidley writes from New Jersey: "I feel that No. 31 was such a marvelous and off-beat issue that I hope this gets in in time for the tally. (*It did. RAWL*) *The Roc Raid* was just too delightful — so far away from what one feared at the title. The writing was fresh, impertinent, and satirically oblique. How did it ever get in to the 1929 *WEIRD TALES*? Thanks for unearthing this novelty.

"And again the writing underscored another, and equally antic, point of view in *For Services Rendered*, a story whose refreshing stance was supplemented as much by what was *not* written down as it was by the offered material. I'm not sure how many times in the long past that I've cried out for continuation of a character in series. (Jirel? de Grandin?) but surely there can be no doubt in the logic of an enjoyable future spent in the company of this unidentified purveyor of 'special services', especially since he seems to haunt the realms that are not smooth-trodden by us investigators of the occult.

"Ernst's first installment had plenty of old grue and, of a pretty known quantity, still had speed and delivery and very few of the mustier trappings usually riddling this genre. And I appreciate anything you offer from *STRANGE TALES* — I never even saw an issue. Never realized it before, but I think that my favorite yarns concern sorcerers, possibly because the authors seem to give more substance to the theme. Derleth and Schorer dreamt up quite a few special ones, as I recall.

"Keller's story edges out Robert E. Howard's, not because it belongs in

MOH but because I'm such a sucker for style.

"The illustrations, which I felt were such an indispensable contribution to the ambience of the magazine, are sorely missed, but your reader's column would indicate that the visually untrained just couldn't care less. Too, too bad.

"Always happy with *The Editor's Page*, especially the reminiscences of early pleasures and discoveries in reading. And why haven't I thought to ask you before — historian that you are? What was the author-title of the first science fiction story I ever read? Two men, reduced in size, enter an ant colony to much adventure. I believe that the issue had the first installment of *The Lunar Consul* (one of the most haunting titles I've ever seen); *WONDER STORIES*, late Spring of 1933, I think. Thanks."

The story you're trying to recall and place is obviously *The Raid on the Termites*, by Paul Ernst, which copped the cover of the June 1932 issue of

ASTOUNDING STORIES. *The Lunar Consul*, by Sidney Patzer, ran in the November and December 1933 issues of *WONDER STORIES*. I agree about the effectiveness of the title, and the story had a fascinating opening; alas, though by no means to be despised (in the frame

of reference wherein it was written and published), the story did not measure up to either title or opening.

It may be that many readers couldn't care less about whether we run the old illustrations for some of the stories or not; but in a way, that's all to the good — if they can't care less, then they won't object. Actually, I see few objections and far more approving comment. The facts of the matter are that, for a time it just wasn't possible to use the artwork for any of the stories in a particular issue of one of our magazines. This was painful to me, because there were some illustrations I liked very much; sadly, the proofs proved that they just would not come out as anything more than over-inked blurs. Much depends upon the condition of my old magazines, and this varies from copy to copy. It has little to do with the actual age of the issue, either, for one will yield pictures that come out well enough while the next — which looks little different to my eyes, is but a few months older, and the quality of the original reproduction seems to be similar — turns out to be impossible to get anything from. I can only add that our new printer seems to be having success with some illustrations which look no different to me than ones with which our former printers could do nothing.



The Editor's Page

(continued from page 9)

Phantom Fighter, I noted a statement in the introductory essay about de Grandin: "Numerically his adventures total almost 300, chronologically they span a quarter-century." Several letters came in to me not long after that, asking about unpublished de Grandin stories, or de Grandin stories that might have appeared elsewhere than in *WEIRD TALES*. Mr. Quinn answered my inquiry on this score in March 1968: "There are no unpublished de Grandin stories. Wright was so sold on the character that he bought the tales immediately — I finally stopped enclosing return postage when submitting a ms." We see then, that "almost 300" in the quotation above is a misprint; it should have been "almost 100" as there are 93 de Grandin tales, one of them the book-length novel, *The Devil's Bride*, another a novella, *Satan's Stepson* — which might possibly have been split into two installments; the rest are short stories or long short stories which would be called novelets today.

I related the matter about *The Phantom Farmhouse* and *The Cloth of Madness* with a *caveat* above, because there was another rumor about the author, going around in the '30s — namely that he was a mortician by trade. And, in fact, I repeated this in one of the introductions to *The Devil's Bride*, when we ran it in three installments here last

year. No, Mr. Quinn replied, last May: "Regarding your biographical note, I have been many things but not a mortician. From 1918 to 1926, I taught mortuary law at the Renouard School for Embalmers in N. Y.; however that is my nearest approach to being a practitioner." The error grew from the fact that Quinn was, at one time, editor of the trade journal, *CASKET AND SUNNYSIDE*.

The de Grandin series increased in popularity, and from the issue of October 1925 to May 1936, Quinn had no other stories in *WEIRD TALES* outside of the series, except for the two appearances in the reprint section mentioned above. Only two, however, appeared in 1934, and one of them, *The Jest of Warburg Tantavul*, I noted as being just about my least favorite in my review of *The Phantom Fighter*, in the second issue of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*.

Quinn wrote (August 1966): "I was interested in your evaluation of the stories, and think a word of explanation should be given respecting Warburg Tantavul. I was a little puzzled over whether to include that story in the book, but decided in its favor because:

- "1. It was (as far as I know) the first instance of getting rid of a troublesome spook by electrocuting him, and
- "2. It was the first pulp story to break

the theretofore impassable barrier against making incest an integral part of the story. Concerning this, *AUTHOR AND JOURNALIST* for October 1934 editorialized: '... incest is, to all intents and purposes, an impossible theme. Offhand, it is faintly conceivable that a delicate handling of this subject might appear in some of the experimental periodicals, or even such purveyors of adult literary fare as *HARPER'S*, *SCRIBNER'S* or *AMERICAN MERCURY*, but in a pulp magazine, never! Yet the September, 1934, issue of *WEIRD TALES*, a pulp magazine for popular consumption, nonchalantly carried a story of out-and-out incest by Seabury Quinn. Moreover, the author justifies it ... And so what: Merely that tabus, like rules, are apparently made to be broken.'

"On the strength of that 'double-first', I included the story in the anthology. Maybe we'll get some repercussions, but more than 30 years have passed since the story's first publication, and mid-Victorian standards have gradually eroded in that time. We'll see."

My guess was that there would be no repercussions, and I have not heard of any; I wrote back cheerfully allowing that his reasons for selecting it seemed to be both sound and good. My lesser fondness for the story had nothing to do with the incest theme. As I wrote to him: "Actually, I never thought it to be a bad, or even a poor story; was a little disappointed at the relatively small percentage of actual weird events, though the ending was most satisfactory. It's a little hard to figure out why this one, rather than another, is at the bottom of my list; but I suspect that this basic sadistic theme — that of manipulating someone into a position where they (sic) would feel terribly guilty and then using that to crush them (sic) — frightened me. Because of

personal experiences. The imaginary horrors make a good escape from the very real ones, but when a fictional terror touches on one that's buried in your own soul, then the pleasure is somewhat mixed. So Warburg is a real fiend to me, but I just can't get the 'pure' pleasure out of reading about his wickednesses as I can out of just about all your other nasty persons!"

This taught me something about myself and the pleasures of reading. It was a long step on my evolution toward the point where I can admire and praise a story which, for some special and personal reason, I either intensely dislike or, at best, have very mixed feelings about.

Getting back to de Grandin: There are a number of other instances where Mr. Quinn was very much of an innovator, and de Grandin employs fascinatingly novel, instead of (or along with) the more or less traditional ways of dealing with supernatural menaces, and I hope we shall be able to reprint some of them.

1925 saw the first two de Grandin tales; 1926 saw 7; 1928, 7; 1929, 9; 1930, 10; 1931, 3; 1932, 5 (one of them being a six-part serial); 1933, 7; 1934, 2 and 1935, 3 — bringing the total thus far up to 62. The January 1936 issue had the 63d tale; four months later, when the May issue appeared with "Seabury Quinn" on the cover, I expected to read the 64th tale (of course, I did not know the number of them at that time). What we found instead, was an independent story entitled *Strange Interval* — a good story, though not weird in the supernatural sense. It wasn't until the end of the year that de Grandin returned. 1937 had 5 de Grandin appearances; in 1938 there were 5 again, with two independent tales as well. At the end of 1939, we began to see the series of independent stories which would make up the bulk of Mr. Quinn's

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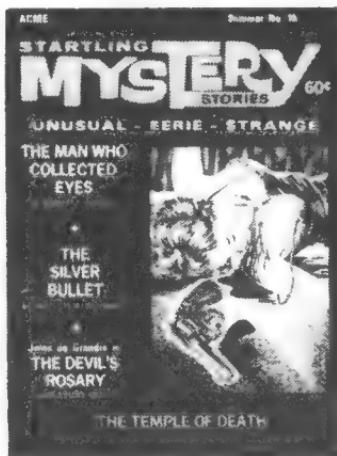
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writing for *WEIRD TALES* thereafter. Three de Grandin stories had appeared that year, and then it seemed as if he had been forgotten, as it was not until 1942 that the 79th story appeared; there would be another in 1944, and in 1945; 6 in 1946; then after a single appearance in 1947, 2 in 1949. The last two stories appeared in 1950 and 1951.

Perhaps both the author and the readers had had enough — or at least enough for the time. Certainly there were requests to bring back de Grandin when he failed to appear at all in 1940 and 1941, but *WEIRD TALES* had a new editor, a different policy, and a new crop of readers coming up. Seabury Quinn was still a favorite author, and he remained so right up to his final appearance in the magazine with a new story: *The Scarred Soul*, March 1952; his very last appearance would be with a reprint of *The Chapel of Mystic Horror*, which is among the best of the de Grandin series.

My correspondence with him started in 1964, when I wrote to him to see if we could make arrangements to reprint *The Phantom Farmhouse*, *The Cloth of Madness*, and "some of the de Grandin tales", without specifying any titles at the moment. What I had in mind, though, was *The Horror on the Links*, the first of the series, which had not been reprinted since its revival in *WEIRD TALES* in the May 1937 issue. About *The Cloth of Madness*, he wrote: "It was conceived during the hard winter of 1918-19 when I was stationed at the Port of Embarkation, Hoboken. You may have heard that men in uniform were not permitted to be served drinks during W.W.I, at least not stateside, but most of us had civvies in our quarters, and one night some other officers and I decided to go 'buffing' (out of uniform) to New York. The cocktail lounge (as we'd call it today) of the Prince George Hotel in East 28th Street was papered at



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that time with a red paper striped with wavy lines of black, and during the course of our innocent merriment one of my companions said, 'Quinn, if I had to look at that paper any length of time I'd go stark, staring mad.' Thus the plot germ was implanted in what I am pleased to call my brain.

"I think *Horror on the Links* would be a good kickoff for any de G stories you propose running. It had its basis in a statue which used to adorn the Museum of Natural History — a gorilla abducting a most attractive nude lady. . . ."

After much consideration, I decided not to reprint the story; reading the version of it that appeared in *The Phantom Fighter* satisfied me that it would not be a wise idea to have two different versions of the story current. Both are good, but my own feeling is that updating the tales has weakened them somewhat.

Early in March 1965, I was alarmed to hear from Quinn that: "In August of last year I suffered what the doctors call a CVA (Cerebral Vascular Accident), which has changed my entire situation. Thus far it has affected only my walking, making movement rather awkward, since I stagger around like a drunken man, but it's beginning to affect my vision also. I have had to resign my position as an intelligence specialist with the Air Force, and am now on the retired list. The doctors tell me there is no cure, or even any effective treatment for the condition, so I'll just have to learn to live with it. Conservatively speaking, it's a dam' nuisance."

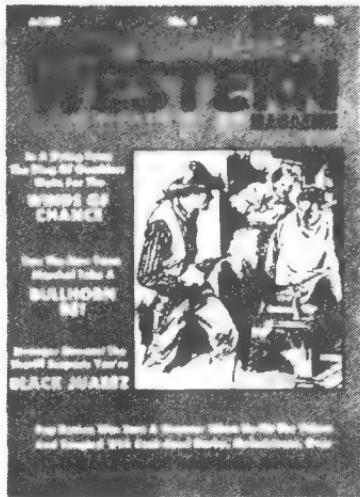
The eye condition grew worse, as his typing showed, and operations affected little easement. He did not lose his wry sense of humor, which comes out in many of the stories. In 1968, he wrote: "The doctors haven't given me much encouragement. CVA cases do not yield readily to treatment, I'm told, but as long as my blood pressure and general

health hold up, I'm advised to live with it and try not to fall down too often. Doctors, it seems to me, are able to bear their patients' infirmities with a considerable degree of fortitude. . . ."

While not a medical man himself, Seabury Quinn was well grounded in the principles of medicine, surgery, anatomy, etc., and his de Grandin series in particular (de G and Trowbridge both being doctors of medicine) show innumerable intricate medical details; I have never heard of his having been called on any of them.

Another stroke left him partially paralysed last autumn, and he died on Wednesday, December 24, 1969 in the Veterans Administration Hospital in Washington. He is survived by his wife, (the former Margaret Child), and a son, Seabury Quinn Jr., of Ohio.

How do his stories read today? Is there any notable difference between the plots of the de Grandin tales, which were made up as he went along, and others which may or may not in any individual instance have been plotted at least partially in advance? I have not re-read any of the independent tales in recent years, but according to a fairly reliable memory of them, I would say that on the whole, certainly, there does not seem to be much difference. An occasional de Grandin tale, such as *The White Lady of the Orphanage* may come to the end of its action — and then continue for pages of needed explanation that runs to seemingly disproportionate length. (So does *The Purloined Letter*, by Edgar Allan Poe, for that matter.) And a reader noted in the March 1935 *WEIRD TALES* that: "Two paragraphs in the story (*Hands of the Dead*, January 1935), one describing the heroine's playing of the *Londonderry Air* on the piano; and the second, telling how she is arrayed in night attire, are almost the exact descriptions used in one of Mr. Quinn's earlier stories, entitled *The*



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Chapel of Mystic Horror." (December 1928).

That such things happened in the course of a series running to 93 stories is not surprising; the greatest of story-tellers have repeated themselves eventually — no, what is surprising is that it happened so seldom. There are astonishingly few discrepancies over the course of the twenty-five years that the series ran. One reason for this is that, as his correspondence in his last years showed, Mr. Quinn had a very good memory; and perhaps he read over his old stories now and then — something that Conan Doyle never bothered to do with Sherlock Holmes tales.

I can only think of one instance of noticeable discrepancy, and that relates to the differences between de Grandin's references to the sweetheart of his youth in *Ancient Fires* (1926) and *The Devil's Bride* (1932). The differences are not terribly serious, but since I planned to run the shorter story around the same time as the longer one, I took the liberty of harmonizing the two accounts. In reference to the novel, Mr. Quinn wrote me in 1968: "... Your proposal to reprint *The Devil's Bride* strikes me as being acceptable. The only thing which has kept me from submitting the whole ms. to Derleth was my fear that the story is outdated (references to 'the King-Emperor' showing that it was written before the accession of Elizabeth II to the throne, for example.)" And, in another letter in the same year: "In connection with the republication of *The Devil's Bride*, please feel free to delete any part of the text which may make for excessive length." This invitation was not taken up, as I did not feel that cutting would improve the story — or, indeed, that any deletions were necessary, except where a phrase or two has much different connotations today than it had then and would result in needless offense.

The reader quoted above, however, also says: "Seabury Quinn's *Hands of the Dead* gets my vote for the best story in the January issue. It was well told, as usual. Those long-flowing sentences so well written, the splendid choice of words, with no pretense of eye-shattering adjectives and tongue-twisting words such as Clark Ashton Smith attempts..."

The Quinn style was one which, in many ways, looks old-fashioned today — not at all up to date, but not quite yet old enough to be considered classic in any way. There is a gentility and an urbanity to it which is not pleasing to many of today's angry young readers who want nothing but the very latest incoherencies, vulgarities, and obscenities, in the name of protest. And back in the '30s and '40s, he was sneered at as "bourgeois" by the angry youngsters (of whatever age) of the time, who felt that it was no time for any writing by anyone except protest and propaganda.

There is an implicit (when not explicit) acceptance and defense of what used to be thought of as the conventional virtues — but not without criticism of smugness, complacency, money-grubbing, and outright hypocrisy, from the clear-eyed de Grandin at the same time. Both foreign language phrases, which you will rarely find a fictional Frenchman in America using these days, and dialects in foreign born characters, are common. There is not, however, bias against any individual who is either a foreign national or an immigrant as such; Trowbridge often shows a stuffy, unthinking response to such "unwashed", but de Grandin never lets him get away with it. *La belle France*, is, of course, the fountain of civilization — but any particular individual, whatever race, creed, color, or national origin, is accepted by de Grandin as being as good as he shows

himself to be. And if he shows himself to be evil, de Grandin never uses this as an indictment of his people *in toto*. The single exception to this refusal to indulge in group condemnation is when de Grandin is dealing with a group all members of which are dedicated to destruction and evil, as with the Satanists in *The Devil's Bride*. Even then, he is sensitive to the social conditions which resulted in the two priests becoming Satanists — but not to the point of condoning this move. Vile social conditions should, indeed, be corrected, but a man is still responsible for his acts, whatever the conditions in society around him.

A few, fortunately very few, tales might be considered as contrived for the purpose of delivering a sermon — whereas, in most of the stories, any social or moral comments come naturally; they seem just the sort of thing that this or that person would say under the circumstances, and the circumstances are worked out in relation to a story to be told, rather than a message to be delivered by any means whatever. I only recall distinctly one story I'd label propaganda, and it might be that this is the only one that may really belong in that category: *Washington Nocturne*. (My sympathy with what the author is contending for cannot overcome my dislike of disguising the homily as a story; as a story, it is tediously dragged out — but it has to be in order to get the message over. Would that it had been written as a sermon instead!)

As suggested above, I do not feel myself in a position to make any hard and fast nominations for the best stories outside of the de Grandin series, but I'll mention the titles of a few that I recall with especial pleasure — and not, please, in order of merit: *Bon Voyage, Michele* (January 1944); *Fortune's Fools* (July

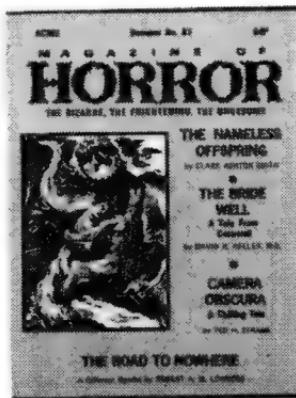
1938); *The Gentle Werewolf* (July 1940); *The Globe of Memories* (February 1937); *The Golden Spider* (March 1940); *Is the Devil a Gentleman?* (July 1942; *Masked Ball* (May 1947); *Glamour* (December 1939); and *More Lives Than One* (December 1938), in addition to the two that you saw reprinted in this magazine. Mr. Quinn himself was particularly fond of *Masked Ball*; I repent my procrastination in getting to it, and will try to have it here soon.

Newspaper obituaries list only physical, material survivors. But Seabury Quinn's survivors include the Jules de Grandin series and a host of other fine weird tales. Outside of *The Phantom Fighter*, only one hard cover book of his was published during his lifetime: this was the special edition of his exceptionally popular short story, *Roads*, which first ran in the January 1938 issue of *WEIRD TALES*. The splendid Arkham House edition, illustrated by Virgil Finlay, was published in 1948, and is now out of print. Another collection, *Is the Devil a Gentleman?*, may be coming from Mirage Press this year.

The last gentleman of the old *WEIRD TALES* (the Edwin Baird years 1923/1924), Seabury Quinn will be remembered with affection by many thousands who read and loved the magazine at any period, as well as a large number of newcomers to the field who have encountered his stories for the first time in the pages of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* and *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*. I regret that I never had occasion to meet him personally, but I am grateful for his letters — yet even more for the opportunity that my editorial position gave me to show him that he had neither been forgotten by the oldtimers nor would be spurned by today's young readers of bizarre and unusual fiction. RAWL

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